

KEEP FIT SESSIONS FACE AXE

Report by Jordan Harris

FREE fitness sessions will be scrapped by Walsall Council in a bid to save £260,000, under new plans. The authority is reviewing how it delivers its public health lifestyle services and wants to cut down on referrals for unhealthy people to take part in free fitness sessions.

A council report reveals that bosses intend to provide more on-line-based services to help people live healthier including offering advice and 'sign posting', meaning they will encourage those who may no longer be able to get free help from the council to look at other ways of



Councillor Ian Robertson

Construction debris among dumped load

TONS of rubble and waste have been dumped outside an industrial estate for a second time in a month – forcing businesses to fork out hundreds of pounds to clear the mess up.

Fly-tippers have emptied construction debris on an access road to Coppice Side industrial estate in Brownhills. The pile dumped in the middle of the road includes carpets, chipboard and barrels.

It comes after 10 tons of rubbish, bricks and trees were dumped at the same site on October 27, before being cleared up three days later.

Mr David Walker, manager of Pro Fit Tyres and Exhausts, said the latest load had been dropped yards from his factory. "It looks awful, it's an eyesore and it could prevent emergency vehicles from getting onto the estate. This happened less than a month ago and on that occasion a few of us chipped in to get rid of it, at a cost of nearly £600. We haven't experienced fly-tipping here before but unless the estate is properly policed, it's going to happen again."

Mr Walker said the 15-ton pile, dumped on November 23, appeared to contain debris from a fast-food restaurant refit.

Adult care budget cuts face scrutiny

A PLAN to save £1.2 million from Walsall Council's adult social care budget is on the agenda for a meeting today.

Last week it was revealed that 42 jobs could be lost as part of proposals that would see the council aim to make £1.19m worth of savings in 2016/17, however, any final decision will not be made until the new year.

A consultation is due on the proposal with councillors, residents, users and voluntary organisations and feedback on this will be presented to today's cabinet meeting.

If changes are then made, the revised plan will go back to the scrutiny panel before a final proposal returns to cabinet members for a decision in 2016. Other savings proposed as part of the budget under consideration include a reduction in administration support costs and adult social care transport budgets following review of individual requirement.

Council leader Councillor Mike Bird has previously warned that the authority's financial future was becoming 'dire' as he revealed a proposal to slash the budget in 2016/17 in October.

getting healthy.

Councillor Ian Robertson, shadow cabinet member for public health, said: "The services will still be run but just on a much more targeted basis, so we would only be referring those who are in serious need of our help."

"In the long run, this could end up costing us more money. You would hope that the plans to offer more online help so people can go about making healthy changes in their own way will work, however, this kind of help will probably not be as good for people as a face-to-face service."

"The population in Walsall isn't a healthy one unfortunately and we do have issues with weight problems, diabetes and other things that put a strain on our resources."

Absence

It is estimated that the consequences of physical inactivity in Walsall could cost the local economy £33 million per year through increased sickness absence, reduced productivity and increased cost to individuals and their carers.

Under the plans which were due to be discussed yesterday, changes will also be brought in for how the council tackles childhood obesity, how it promotes health in the workplace and how members of the public can access public health services.

The report says: "The economic burden of unhealthy lifestyles in Walsall is substantial. Most importantly the people of Walsall are experiencing poorer health and quality of life than those who live in most other areas of the country and many have their lives cut short by entirely preventable illnesses."

"The proposed changes within the new lifestyle model include no longer commissioning free physical activity sessions for adults across the borough."

A Santa-sational display from Gary



Gary Groves, of Leamore, with son Thomas, aged four among their winter wonderland which has lit up their home in Bagnall Street

Lights entertainment

THEY are a special kind of breed and the chances are, there is one who lives not too far from you.

That family that goes all out at Christmas determined to have the most elaborate lights display.

Gary Groves, a 45-year-old father and step-father of seven, has decorated his home in Bagnall Street, Leamore, for almost a decade but has made the extra effort in the last few years after his youngest child Thomas, aged four, had been ill.

Mr Groves said: "He was really ill when he was about 18 months old. He was in a coma and his heart stopped but from that he has come out of it perfect. You love and cherish all of your kids but something like that makes you realise how

precious a child's life is. You just want to make every day special but especially Christmas."

The efforts of Mr Groves, a professional boxer, have not gone unnoticed and every year hundreds of people from all over the Black Country make festive pilgrimages to the home to get into the seasonal spirit. A laser light which explodes into stars is among the new additions making this year's display bigger and better than before.

Mr Groves added: "I have had people from Brierley Hill bring their kids and from Bridgnorth. It just puts a bit of magic back into kids' lives that we had when we were young. I go out there in my Santa outfit and they love it."

TRANSPORT

£76m electrification of railway is on track

NETWORK Rail has confirmed the £76 million electrification of the Chase Line between Walsall and Rugeley will be completed quashing fears the project would be put on hold.

The rail operator has included the scheme in its recently published five-year funding programme. The report also confirmed that a £5.5m project to enhance speed on the line from 45mph up to 75mph had also been approved.

The electrification scheme along the 15-mile stretch started in 2013. It should now be finished by December 2017 as planned.

GASWORKS

Inquiry begins over housing estate land

AN inquiry into an area of contaminated land on a Walsall housing estate has begun. The former Willenhall Town Gasworks site, now known as the Stonegate Housing Estate, was identified as contaminated by Walsall Council back in 2007.

Extensive tests were then carried out on the site, which led to the discovery that 83 gardens contained potentially dangerous metals, tars and chemicals.

The public inquiry is expected to finish at the end of this week.

COUNCIL

Adoption figures for town plummet

THE number of children put up for adoption in Walsall has dropped after hitting its highest ever total last year. The number of children being presented for an adoption agency decision has reduced from 60 in 2013-14 to 25 this year. Council bosses were due to discuss the authority's annual adoption report at a meeting yesterday.

A statement attached to the report reads: "Whilst this may be seen a dramatic reduction, it must be seen in the context that the figure of 60 is the highest Walsall has ever had and that over the course of the previous five years, the figure has always been within the range of 29-35."

INSIDE

BIG OPENING IS ON COURSE



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Distraction burglars targeting homes

BOGUS callers claiming to be rat catchers, council workers and gardeners targeted seven homes in the Black Country in one day.

Police are warning residents to be on their guard against distraction burglars after the incidents in Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

More than £500 was stolen from the house of an 87-year-old woman in Dudley after two men who claimed to be rat catchers searched the property.

On another occasion a man asked for £220 to repair a fence panel which was down as well as getting rid of rats in the garden in a Walsall address. The bogus callers did not make off with any

other cash but officers are urging residents not to fall victim and to report anything suspicious.

They mainly targeted elderly residents and tried to get access into their homes or ask for hundreds of pounds of cash to carry out the jobs last Tuesday. Detective Constable Steve Trotman, from West Midlands Police, said: "We want people to be on their guard and not fall victim to distraction burglars. We believe the same men are responsible with mainly elderly and vulnerable people targeted. They claimed to be there to solve a rat infestation or damaged fence panel problem, then attempted to gain entry to the house or asked the victim for cash to pay for job."

"We are advising homeowners to be extra cautious when answering the door to strangers and to always ask for identification before letting anybody in. If in doubt, keep them out."

Police are urging people to check on the door caller through the spy hole, put a chain across the door before opening and ask for an identity card.

Officers say genuine callers won't mind if you close the door while you check.

By previous incidents, police say bogus callers sometimes work in pairs, with one causing the distraction while the other steals items and cash from the property. Anyone with concerns should call police on 101 and in an emergency dial 999.

Cigarettes smuggler is locked up for three years

A CIGARETTE smuggler has been jailed for three years after being caught with more than 250,000 illegal cigarettes valued at more than £160,000.

Gulan Shaikh, aged 64, of Essington Road, Willenhall, was spotted using a mobile phone while driving in September 2014. Officers who searched his van found 16 boxes containing cigarettes and rolling tobacco inside.

The officers then searched his home, where over 57,000 cigarettes were stored in the garage. Altogether, it was estimated Shaikh's collection of cigarettes and tobacco totalled £102,180.

Wolverhampton Crown Court heard that Shaikh, who was also part of a £1 million tobacco smuggling plot back in 2004 which saw him jailed for 18 months, was released on bail prior to his case going to court, only to be caught again. In January, he was seen carrying boxes into a property on Buckingham Drive in Willenhall which was being rented by a Nirmal Kainth.

Officers searched the property and found £60,994 worth of tobacco as well as cash. Kainth, 47, denied knowing that Shaikh was storing tobacco inside. Shaikh and Kainth both pleaded guilty to defrauding her majesty's customs, to which both pleaded guilty.

Kainth was given a nine-month prison sentence suspended for 18 months and ordered to carry out 150 hours unpaid community work, while Shaikh was given a three-year jail term. Defence solicitor Gurdeep Garcha said Shaikh regretted the crime.

Chiefs admit difficulties finding schools solution

EDUCATION bosses in Walsall admitted they 'don't seem to be able to come up with the answer' on how to tackle school performance problems in the borough.

It was revealed last week that primary schools in Walsall are posting some of the worst test scores in the country, ranking joint 142nd out of 152 local authorities.

Just 76 per cent of pupils are achieving level 4 or above in reading, maths and writing, compared to London, which ranked highest with a 96 per cent success rate. The national average was 80 per cent.

The borough's poor showing in the annual primary school league tables came just a week after Ofsted's annual report revealed Walsall was in the bottom five per cent in the country for youngsters attending good or outstanding schools.

Councillor Mike Bird, leader of Walsall Council, said: "Like always education is a big problem and we don't seem to be able to come up with the answer. This is something that we genuinely do need to address, especially in relation to primary education, because you only get one chance at that. We do seem to be underachieving very badly."

Concerned

"It is a major issue for us but it doesn't seem to be an easy nut to crack."

The academic performance table ranked Wolverhampton, Dudley, Sandwell and Staffordshire as joint 79th, all with an 80 per cent success rate.

The council's education boss, councillor Chris Towe, said Walsall's success rate had gone up by three per cent compared to the previous year but claimed he was still concerned about the results.

He said: "Obviously we are disappointed that some of our schools are not performing to the level they should be. Our young people in Walsall deserve the best education we can give them and I would like to assure people that we are working hard to make sure that is achieved. We are making progress, I firmly believe that."

Walsall councillor Doug James, who represents Darlaston, said the figures were 'shocking' to see and claimed urgent work was needed. He said: "I think we need a complete education revolution in Walsall."

RAC drives forward after deal



The famous RAC control centre building overlooking the M6 where new owners have taken over

MORE than 700 RAC workers in Walsall are under new owners after the roadside rescue service was sold in deal thought to value the business at £1.4 billion.

CVC, the European investment group, has bought just under half the business from private equity group Carlyle, which has owned the RAC since 2011. The RAC's landmark control room overlooking the M6 between junctions 8 and 9, at Bescot in Walsall, is part of its headquarters operations centre

on Brookhurst Crescent employing 750 people. It employs around 4,000 people in all and last year its 1,500 patrols attended about 2.3 million roadside breakdowns.

The other major shareholder in the business is Singapore sovereign wealth fund GIC, which bought nearly half the company from Carlyle last year. The latest deal means Carlyle has sold up all its interest in the UK's second biggest breakdown recovery group which it originally bought from insurance giant

Aviva for around £1 billion. CVC, which is the biggest shareholder in Formula One, bought its stake in the RAC using its new Strategic Opportunities Platform which it has set up for longer term investments.

The 118-year-old RAC currently has 8.6 million members. Since it was bought by Carlyle its revenues have risen to £498 million in 2014 from £417m in 2010. It has also invested heavily in improving energy efficiency at its sites.

Healthwatch set to be dropped

WALSALL'S health watchdog is set to be dropped by the borough council in favour of a different body due to a number of 'difficulties' in the last two years.

Healthwatch Walsall has suffered a number of problems since it was commissioned by the authority in 2013 - high turnover of staff, changes in senior management as well as issues with relationships between board members.

As a result the council launched an independent investigation into the body including scrutinising its finances and how it was ran. The probe was completed in October and several recommendations are now being introduced.

The watchdog is made up of members from MyNHS Walsall, Walsall LINK, Age UK, Walsall Housing Group and the borough's Citizen's Advice Bureau.

Town Hall talk date for rocker Iommi

BLACK Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi is to take part in an Audience With-style show about his life in Birmingham at the Town Hall on March 19. The 67-year-old heavy metal legend will be interviewed by old friend and TV sports presenter Gary Newbon.

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Hundreds sign protest in call over bad parking

MORE than 180 concerned parents and staff have signed a petition calling for action to tackle illegal parking outside a Wednesbury school.

Old Park Primary School headteacher Teresa Boddington branded the situation an 'accident waiting to happen'. The petition calls for a lollipop lady to be instated at the school alongside a zebra crossing.

Complaints of vehicles speeding, parking on zig-zag lines and across driveways when picking up and dropping off children at the school have been on-going in recent months.

Parent, Hardeep Bhillion, whose four-year-old son is currently in reception class, said that she decided to start the petition after she feared a major accident would happen.

She explained: "It is frightening to think that the children may be at risk when going in and out of school - all just due to people parking inconsiderately on the road."

"I was even crossing myself when a car came speeding out of nowhere. It has been an on-going problem for quite a while, but this is the first time I have decided to start a petition."

Headteacher Mrs Boddington added: "We are working closely with local PCSOs and have even set up our own junior PCSO system where children alert drivers to inconsiderate parking too."

"We are working together to appeal to the council to hopefully introduce some calming and road safety measures, as it is an accident waiting to happen."

250 have a say on budget plans

AROUND 250 people have had their say on Walsall budget cuts as part of a borough-wide consultation.

Council chiefs are looking to save £85 million over the next four years and a public consultation was launched in early November so people could comment on what service areas should be prioritised. They can also give their verdict on proposed changes to services in 2016/17. The consultation was expected to be available to thousands.

A report on the feedback that has come through so far reads: "The results summarised here are based on a small number of responses mostly of which were gathered online. Results are therefore a snapshot of opinion and should be treated as such."

Nice touch to pub comedy night

COMEDIAN Barbara Nice, who appeared on Peter Kay's Phoenix Nights, will headline the stand-up comedy night at the Newhampton Inn, Wolverhampton on December 16. Tickets are £6 or £10 with food.

Just 10 beds available at Manor



The Manor Hospital in Walsall

WALSALL Manor Hospital and New Cross in Wolverhampton were so full they only had 32 beds to spare between them across a weekend this month, new figures have revealed.

At the Manor, just 10 beds were available over the weekend of December 4 and 6, while at New Cross, run by Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust, there were 22.

It got worse a few days before, on December 2, when there were no free beds at Manor Hospital, which is run by Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust.

The figures, released by the NHS,

show hospital trusts in the region are already feeling the pressures of winter. Over the same weekend, Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust had 705 available beds and 631 occupied at Russells Hall Hospital.

Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust, which runs Sandwell General Hospital, fared the best over the period, with just 613 of its 719 beds used.

Richard Cattell, chief operating officer at Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust said: "We work hard to develop a winter plan to ensure we have measures

in place to deal with the challenges that the season brings."

"We also urge the people of Walsall and the wider West Midlands to help support us during these times of high pressure and consider whether they need to attend an emergency department or whether they could be treated elsewhere such as by their GP or at a walk-in centre."

Gwen Nuttall, chief operations officer at the Royal Wolverhampton Trust, said: "Like every other trust in the country we have experienced capacity pressures."

39 charged with drink driving in first week

ALMOST 40 motorists have been charged during the first week of a festive drink driving crackdown by West Midlands Police.

There has also been a surge in the numbers arrested for driving while under the influence of drugs.

Officers across the region have been carrying out unmarked patrols and acting on tip-offs after launching the seasonal drink-and-drug-drive campaign from the start of the December.

In the first seven days of the crackdown, 49 people were arrested and 39 charged to appear at court. The highest breath test so far has been 108 - three times the drink-drive limit.

The Christmas crackdown has also seen police officers carrying out roadside drug tests on those suspected of getting behind the wheel while under the influence of illegal substances.

The Central Motorway Police Group (CMPG) - leading the campaign for West Midlands Police, made 13 arrests for positive drug tests from motorists in the first week - compared to two in 2014. It comes after new legislation to help police catch drug drivers came into force, along with £40,000 of Department for Transport funding for roadside test kits.

Arrested

CMPG Inspector Greg Jennings said the primary aim is to make the roads safe for everyone. He added: "The changes to the law have allowed us to arrest more than five times the number of drug drivers this year than last."

"The truth is if you take that risk of driving after using drugs you are far more likely to be arrested today. We know the party season is upon us and we will be increasing our efforts to take offenders off the road and make law-abiding revellers safer. Getting behind the wheel while under the influence of drink or drugs can cause a serious risk to others on the road, let alone yourself."

He added: "Combining drink and illegal drugs is especially deadly - it has been found that drivers who have consumed both are 23 times more likely to be involved in a fatal crash than sober drivers."

Over the course of last year's campaign 2,437 motorists were stopped for breath tests with 285 providing a positive test or failed to provide a sample. This was followed by a summer crackdown which saw CMPG officers make 69 drink-drive arrests from 259 breath tests - a hit rate of 26 per cent.



Taking a swing on the golf course being built at Wood Farm Golf and Leisure, Essington, is green keeper Barry Wood, of Walsall

Nearly time for tee at course

WITH the paths set, the bunkers dug and the clubhouse ready to build, the £3 million Essington Golf Club is now '80 per cent' complete, says its owner.

As plans were submitted earlier this month for a £2m expansion and an extra nine holes, owner Brian Saunders spoke about how the development that was first announced eight years ago is progressing.

"We're currently in the last part of the landscaping stage which we hope to finish in the next few months," he said. "Then we've got to leave it to mature."

It's been a long time coming for the 80-acre site between Burnships Road and Broad Lane were first submitted in February 2007. The construction of the nine-hole course was hit by the recession. Material costs soared and progress was halted. But now the site is just months away from completion.

Mr Saunders, from Coven, said: "In the future it's going to be a top course, but these things take time, they don't take five minutes. It's a long term thing but once it's done it will be there forever."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Firearm alert ends in m'way closure

TRAFFIC on the M6 was brought to a standstill after a report to police of a motorist carrying a firearm.

Officers closed off the southbound carriageway between junctions 11a and 12 around 1pm on Sunday.

A member of the public had reported that people travelling in a white BMW were allegedly carrying a gun. Officers caught up with the driver and searched the vehicle but nothing was found.

Duty Inspector Jonathan Staite said: "The driver was advised to continue on their journey."

Fire originates in electric cupboard

A KITCHEN was badly damaged in a house fire in Walsall. It took 15 firefighters to deal with the blaze at Gilly Avenue, near Daisy Bank, on Saturday. Crews from Walsall and Bloxwich stations arrived shortly after the flames were reported around 3.20pm.

The fire originated from a ground floor electrical cupboard. No-one was in the building at the time.

Western Power were called out to isolate the electric supply. The blaze left the kitchen 40 per cent damaged from fire and 60 per cent damaged from smoke.

Mariah all set for arena date

SUPERSTAR Mariah Carey will perform in Birmingham next year as part of her first tour of Europe for 13 years. The singer will bring her Sweet Sweet Fantasy tour to the Barclaycard Arena on March 20.

The best-selling female artist of all time is touring after a sell-out Las Vegas residency.

Tickets go on general sale at 9am on Friday priced from £51.33-£79.45.

Book online at www.theticketfactory.com or call 0844 33 88 222.

Market venue move with Banks's match

BESCOT Market will appear in Union Street, Wednesbury this Sunday, due to the rearranged Walsall v Port Vale football match live on Sky Sports at Banks' Stadium.

Their will, however, be an additional market at the home of Walsall FC the next day, Monday 21. All usual traders will be present at both so people can join in the festive fun.

For further information please contact 07889 975 701 or email bescot.p@hotmail.co.uk

JLR Slovakia decision

JAGUAR Land Rover is expected to sign a deal with the Slovak government soon on a production plant in the eastern European country, according to reports.

JLR, owned by India's Tata Motors, has chosen the city of Nitra for the proposed factory, due to open in 2018.

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WINTER is icumin-in, so it's off to the annual pre-Xmas entertainment, an evening of mediaeval music with ye authentic olde instruments. These events are a reminder of how our horny-handed ancestors were prepared to suck, blow, pluck, crank, squeeze or wallop almost anything in the hope of getting a tune out of it. Holloved-out gourds, stretched skins, reeds, lumps of wood and pigs' bladders were all pressed into service. This concert featured a bagpipe which looked like a hockey stick inserted in a dead badger. I bet you'd get much the same noise using a live badger. The one disadvantage of England defeating the Spanish Armada in 1588 was that it delayed the arrival of guitars, and proper music, for several centuries.

WHEN Donald Trump calls for a ban on all Muslims entering the United States, he is surfing on one of those occasional waves of paranoia that have swept America ever since it was first settled. From witches to flying saucers, via communists, alien abductions, Freemasons, Catholics and secret brain implants (can you feel it, just under your ear?), the US seems to have occasional panics and conspiracy theories. I can't think of any explanation for this desire to be frightened except that the US arms industry is enormous and every new panic surely sells more guns.



MIND you, when Trump alleges that cops are scared to enter some parts of London, the instant denial by the Metropolitan Police is unconvincing. Fact: most British towns and cities have their share of dodgy streets. I recall the Liverpool gag about a neighbourhood so tough that the police patrolled not in pairs but in threes – and that was inside the police station. This joke is at least 50 years old.

FIRST, those little peaked hats were known as Lenin caps after the leader of the Russian revolution. Then, when the Beatles adopted them, they became Lennon caps. As Britain became a member of the EU and we all got more continental, they were marketed as Breton fishermen caps. And now, favoured by the Labour Party leader, they are being sold on eBay as Corbyn caps. You can't help noticing how many men of a certain age are now wearing them. Or wondering whether they were bought in tribute to Vladimir, John, French fishermen or Jeremy.

Don't miss Peter Rhodes every Monday to Friday in your Express & Star

£1.6m park and ride on the way

PLANS for a 196-space car park at a Walsall tram station will be submitted to the borough council following a huge public campaign for the project.

More than 300 people signed a petition calling for funding to be set aside for the £1.6million project which will bring a park and ride service to Bradley Lane Metro Station.

Centro launched a public consulta-

tion on the scheme earlier this year but have now confirmed they will formally apply for planning consent from the council early in the new year.

As well as improving transport links in the area it will also alleviate parked cars clogging up the streets near the line.

Centro spokesman Steve Swingle said: "We provide free parking at

four locations along the Metro line and these are extremely popular and consequently very busy. Five million people already use the Metro each year but we expect this figure to rise to eight million after the Birmingham city centre extension opening.

"As a result we anticipate demand for Park and Ride to also increase which is why we have drawn up plans for this 196 space car park." Walsall

Councillor Doug James, who represents Darlaston South, has been at the forefront of calls for a park and ride service in the area along with the Metro Business Partnership.

He said: "This has been a campaign I have been pushing for for several months so I'm delighted that it's come to fruition. Bradley Lane is the only Metro Station in Walsall and I am proud that it is in my ward."

Caparo deal results in 623 jobs being saved

By John Corser

A FURTHER 623 jobs have been saved at collapsed steel firm Caparo after a deal was sealed by administrators.

The remaining 10 businesses in the Caparo Industries Group – including seven in the Black Country – have been sold including seven sites in the Black Country.

Jobs at businesses based in Willenhall, West Bromwich, Wednesbury, Cradley Heath, Dudley and Oldbury have been saved.

Administrators confirmed the businesses had been sold to the Gupta family, whose interests include the SIMEC and Liberty House groups. Union officials called the sale 'excellent news', helping to put workers' minds at rest in the run-up to Christmas.

Among the businesses sold is Clydesdale Jones, Caparo Modular Systems and Caparo Advanced Composites, in Willenhall, where 142 jobs have been saved. At Caparo Precision Strip – JB&S Lees, based in Albion Road, West Bromwich, 170 workers' jobs have been saved.

Confirmed

In total 29 jobs have been protected at West Bromwich-based business Caparo Drawn Products and Fairbright Wire, in Phoenix Street. Administrators confirmed 123 positions have been preserved at Caparo Aluminium Bridge, in Bridge Street, Wednesbury.

Also sold is CMT Engineering, in Corngreaves Road, Cradley Heath, which is made up of tube fittings, dynamics, clamps and insulation businesses where 40 have been saved.

Six jobs have been saved at Caparo Forging, in Marriott Road, Dudley, and 23 jobs at the group headquarters in Oldbury.

Matthew Hammond, Midlands Region chairman for PwC and Caparo lead administrator said: "We are delighted to have completed the sales – it is great news for the Midlands."

Museum celebrates best ever year



Delighted museum director Alan Bishop sells a ticket to Henry Meakin, aged 13, visiting from the south west

ASTON Manor Transport Museum has seen its greatest number of visitors to the venue in its 35-year history.

With a couple of days to spare the venue at Shenstone Drive, Aldridge, has seen around 5,500 people through its doors this calendar year which is narrowly more than its previous best, charity chiefs confirmed.

The museum costs around £50,000 a year to run with little outside funding and chairman Martin Fisher said its main source of income was through its visitors. He said: "The biggest part about this is getting the museum's name out there. The fact that more and more people in the local community have heard about us is the main thing because that's where we feel the greatest support is coming from in the future." The museum

opened in the Wotton area of Birmingham near Villa Park where it remained until 2011. In fact it was that year which saw the last highest visitor numbers with doubt lingering about whether the venue would reopen.

It relocated to a site in Aldridge only holding a few sporadic events in 2012 but it moved to Shenstone Drive and reopened to the public properly in 2013.

Mr Fisher put this year's success down to several events the museum has hosted throughout 2015.

He said: "They like to have things here because of the vehicles which make it a nice backdrop which means we get more people through the door. Aldridge Arts had an event here and we had an antiques fair. Our most successful event was the model show in March."

Force pays out nearly £1m to deal with claims

WEST Midlands Police has paid out nearly £1 million to the public in compensation in the last three years.

People have successfully claimed for wrongful arrest, false imprisonment, trespassing and assault, among others, during the period.

The highest payout was £57,500 back in November 2012 for wrongful arrest, false imprisonment, trespass and wrongful infringement of human rights. This year alone the Police were forced to pay out £389,596.40 to the public, and this figure excludes the amount it has paid out in compensation to its own force.

This figure has risen year on year, with £243,253.08 paid out in 2013 and £297,596.40 in 2014.

Other examples of high payouts include £45,000 for assault, wrongful arrest and false imprisonment and £26,500 for wrongful arrest, false imprisonment, trespass and infringement of human rights.

The TaxPayers' Alliance raised concerns over the 'huge amount of money' that was not 'going into front-line policing'.

Alex Wild, research director at the Alliance, said: "This is a huge amount of money that is not going into front-line policing at a time when savings have to be made."

"Of course mistakes will be made from time to time and those who have been wrongfully arrested or falsely imprisoned are entitled to compensation, but forces really must minimise their errors and ensure that any payouts aren't excessive."

Bus lane protest names handed in

A PETITION calling for the removal of a controversial bus lane in Walsall has been handed in to bosses.

The petition, launched by Bloxwich councillor Shaun Fitzpatrick is asking that the lane in Bloxwich High Street is removed and has been supported by 1,158 people.

Councillor Fitzpatrick said: "We have handed the petition over to the council and now we look forward to finding out when it will be properly discussed. The number of signatures we have collected shows that the people of Bloxwich don't believe this bus lane is needed in this area."

The petition was put together in the wake of complaints about a traffic enforcement camera put in place on September 22, with protesters claiming it was catching drivers out unfairly.

Transformation of old offices scrapped

A SCHEME to turn derelict former office buildings has been scrapped.

Plans to transform the old Hammond Heat Treatment site, Heath Road, Darlaston, into industrial units, alongside a newly built workshop have been withdrawn by the agent.

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Attacker in sentence fight loses appeal bid

A DRUG addict from Walsall who robbed a dementia-suffering pensioner, leaving him with ‘blood running down’ his face, had an appeal to cut his 10-year jail sentence refused.

Craig Andrew Powis, aged 30, of Darlaston Road, Pleck and two other addicts targeted the 86-year-old man ‘who lived alone and was highly vulnerable in order to rob him to buy drugs’ in October 2013.

Kerry Wilkes, 32, knew of the victim and got access to his flat in Walsall in October 2013 before letting in Powis and Wilfred Clarke, 33.

They beat their elderly victim around the head and searched his clothes and home, causing ‘a great deal of upset and physical injury’, London’s Appeal Court heard.

After being robbed of his wallet, the pensioner was seen by neighbours looking distressed and bewildered, said Judge Jeremy Carey. He has recovered from his injuries but his dementia was ‘made worse as a result of the trauma of this incident’, added the judge.

Each of the three robbers were jailed at Wolverhampton Crown Court on June 3 after admitting robbery.

Wilkes, of Roebuck Glade, Willenhall, was locked up for nine years, while Clarke, from Sheridan Street, Walsall, received an eight-year term.

Powis’ lawyers tried to convince Judge Carey that his his 10-year jail term was far too tough. But the judge, sitting with Lady Justice Sharp and Mr Justice Warby, said: ‘This was a severe sentence, but justly so.’

Probe on £65m Junction 10 bid

A REPORT on how a massive £65 million revamp of an M6 junction could impact the environment has been ordered. Walsall Council is set to commission the report into the junction 10 project unveiled by Highways England last week.

They presented preferred options on the proposed shape of the roundabout featuring a pair of new four-lane bridges across the motorway and it was put out for public consultation.

Consultant architects Moore Environment has now provided extensive advice to the council on what areas need to be covered in the environmental impact assessment.

Council spokesman Ian Smart said: “The development on the junction itself is set to kick off in 2018.”

It Wood be sold out for Roy’s gig

ROY Wood’s gig in Wolverhampton this month has sold out. The Birmingham rocker, who founded Electric Light Orchestra and Wizzard, is playing at the Robin 2 in Bilston on December 20.

Cause of death crash still unknown



Crash victim John Kamelski

A CORONER was unable to ascertain what happened in an M6 crash in which a 65-year-old man died.

John Kamelski, from Penkridge, had been on his way to an appointment in Birmingham on the morning of July 3 when he collided with a static HGV at around 8.10am.

The crash happened on the south-bound carriageway in lane one next to the Hilton Services entry slip road between junctions 11 and 10a.

In the initial aftermath, members of the public rushed to save Mr Kamelski and carry out first aid, but he

died the following day. In an inquest at Cannock Coroner’s Court, South Staffordshire senior coroner Andrew Haigh concluded that the death was accidental, adding: “The area where the collision happened was the site of long term roadworks, so there was a lot of slowing down and stopping by motorists compared to normal.

“He has not realised this until the very last second and as a result he has driven into the back of a static large goods vehicle. I am sorry that I can’t reach a clear conclusion.

“My formal conclusion is one of ac-

cidental death. I am sorry that I can’t say precisely what the cause of the collision was.”

Staffordshire police sergeant Jon King was first on the scene of the accident and enlisted the help of other motorists to stop traffic.

He also called on a member of the public to divert vehicles along the slip road at Hilton Park services, before dialling 999 and climbing into the Mercedes Mr Kamelski had been driving to check on him. Sgt King comforted Mr Kamelski while he waited for emergency services to arrive.

£1m gala baths work set to get underway

WORK on a £1million overhaul of Walsall’s Gala Baths will start at the end of the month with a completion date set for April, it has emerged.

The centre will close on Christmas Eve and a partial service – comprising the brine pool, fitness suite and dance and spinning studios – will be provided from January 25.

The Gala Pool will be closed for the duration of the works. Council chiefs say it will re-open after Easter.

A revamp of the outdated town centre building was initially due to be completed by the end of the year but the works programme was changed after talks with contractors to limit the impact on service users.

A new family changing area, remodelled reception, sauna and a boom to split the pool into main and learner sections are scheduled.

Preparatory works have already taken place, including the removal of asbestos from the 50-year-old building.

The rest of the work will see the main pool drained to allow the installation of a boom to create a 25 metre competition pool and a new warmer teaching pool. A modern unisex changing area and sauna will replace the separate male and female changing rooms.

Revised

The baths’ main entrance and reception area will also be completely remodelled. The temporary operation will also run a revised programme with temporary access arrangements.

Chris Holliday, the council’s head of leisure and culture, said: “It is good to see this work now getting under way. The refurbishment represents the largest investment on the Gala Baths since it was built in 1961. It will see the facilities transformed, making large areas of the centre fit for the 21st century.

“It’s unfortunate that it has not been possible to keep all parts of the centre open during the refurbishment but given the scale of the improvements, it just wasn’t going to be practical or safe to maintain a complete service from the site during the building works. I’d like to thank our customers for bearing with us while the improvements have been ongoing.”

The improvements at Walsall Gala Baths will complement the £24m investment being undertaken to build active living centres at Bloxwich and Oak Park. Some £2m is being provided from Sport England’s ‘Iconic’ facilities fund and £300,000 from the Football Foundation.



The raiders use a sledgehammer to smash windows at the jewellers



And they’re off – the brazen thieves are in and out in 15 seconds



Shocked traders and passers-by gather outside the shop

Gone in 15 seconds as gang hits store

TWO balaclava-clad thieves wielding a sledgehammer and axe smashed through the front window of a Walsall jewellers and snatched more than £30,000 of goods within seconds.

Dramatic CCTV footage captures the moment the brazen robbers took just 15 seconds to break into Laxmi Jewellers in Pleck before fleeing the scene in a black Ford Focus – believed to be stolen. The audacious daytime attack took place as several vehicles, including a bus, drove past less than 20ft away on Wednesbury Road shortly after 5pm on Tuesday.

It is not the first time the family-run jewellers has been targeted after thieves rammed their way into the shop in 2010 stealing £9,000 worth of items. Manager Amrit Verma, aged 28, said the thieves knew what they were doing and took up to seven gold Asian wedding sets. The shop has been closed since the raid.

Less than a minute after the men struck, more than a dozen neighbouring traders and stunned onlookers descended on the scene looking shocked at what had happened. Anyone with information should call 101 or Crimestoppers on 0800 555111.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Jump centre to create 116 jobs

A TRAMPOLINE centre will open in Walsall in February, creating more than 100 jobs.

Bosses at Jump Nation will open at Bentley Mill Way in February, and bosses have revealed work is under way.

Michelle Ball, managing director and co-founder of Jump Nation, said: “We are thrilled to start building a new park for Walsall.

“The expansion will mark the start of a very exciting year for Jump Nation and with the new site, we are looking to create up to 116 jobs.”

Christmas cards in aid of hospice

ACORNS Children’s Hospice is raising money by selling its own range of Christmas cards.

The range includes three seasonal designs created by children cared for by the charity, with all proceeds going towards Acorns and its work.

To continue its care, Acorns needs over £9 million every single year for its three hospices and relies on fund-raising.

The cards can be purchased from any one of Acorns’ network of retail shops, by calling 01564 825 027 or at www.acorns.org.uk

Burglary victim’s fund hits £1,300

A FUND set up by Beechdale residents after an 87-year-old woman’s house was burgled has climbed to more than £1,300.

Margaret Devey had £1,000 worth of precious jewellery and £500 stolen from her Beechdale home on November 25. Neighbours set up a crowd funding site so she could buy Christmas presents for her family.

To donate to the fund, visit <https://crowdfunding.justgiving.com/maddy-gregory>

Building firm told to hand over website

A BLACK Country builders’ merchant which set up a website with a similar name to B&Q has been ordered to hand over the online address.

The DIY giant complained after Wednesbury-based Darlaston Builders Merchants registered the internet address ‘bandqbricks.co.uk’. The case went to internet watchdog Nominet and now an independent expert has ordered that the address be given up.

Expert Nick Phillips said B&Q had shown it had rights in a name ‘identical’

Tuck into free offer

WORKERS at a takeaway and restaurant in Wolverhampton city centre are spreading goodwill.

Employees at Market Fish Bar on Salop Street are giving up their free time on Christmas Eve between 6-8pm and Christmas Day, 11am-1pm, and offering free hot food and drinks.

ADVERTISEMENT

Cloudy2Clear Windows – Service With A Smile!

It’s been a crazy few months for Cloudy2Clear Windows. The company which specialises in repairing windows which are steamed up, broken or damaged by replacing the panes – not the frames has grown rapidly as homeowners take advantage of their services.

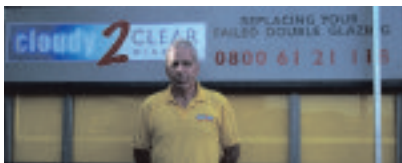
Managing Director Brian Stanley feels that it’s all about service. “Our product is simple. If your double glazing is misted up we can replace the glass at a fraction of the cost of a new window, in any type of frame, and with a new 5 year guarantee. But it’s not just about saving people

money, although that obviously helps. Many tradespeople have struggled since last year and I honestly feel that during the good times a minority perhaps didn’t focus on customer care as much as they should have done.

We make sure we turn up when we say we will, do the job the customer requires and leave their house as clean as a whistle. I often get comments back from customers on how they really didn’t expect that sort of service which, in a way, is very sad for the service industry as a whole.”

Cloudy2Clear service Wolverhampton and the surrounding

area and Brian is finding that his approach is a major factor in his success. “The truth is that it’s not just the personal satisfaction that I get from doing a good job but also it makes good business sense. I get a huge amount of business from friends and family of people



I’ve done work for, which just goes to show how much a little bit of effort is appreciated.”

So, if your windows are steamed up, broken or damaged give Brian a call for a free quotation on 0800 61 21 118 and he’ll be happy to help!

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Clear up the mess on our streets

MIGHT I just say how disgusted I am with the state of Palfrey, Caldmore and Pleck. I have lived in this area for 50 years and never before have I seen the amount of rubbish on our streets that I have in the last few months.

Just walking through Palfrey I see mattresses, old settees, burst bin bags spewing their contents over the pavements and bins outside people's houses crawling with maggots. The amount of litter blowing around obviously from the local retailers and schools is beyond a joke, countless pop

and beer cans, sweet wrappers, crisp packets and countless other flotsam and jetsam. It's a total disgrace, why aren't people held responsible for dropping litter? Why aren't people made to clean up after themselves?

Why aren't the local council in schools helping to teach our young about 'keeping Britain tidy' an old saying but it needs to be revived, I taught my children to put their rubbish in the bin it's not a difficult concept to grasp!

J DANKS
Walsall

Idiocy of van driver on the road

I HAVE read with interest some of the correspondence recently regarding some people's fears and worries of the driving skills of the West Midlands.

All of you are correct. There are some bad drivers out there who are putting everybody at risk. Let me add another story to the collection of gaffes and idiocy: I was driving from Wolverhampton city centre at the Bilston Island when a white van in front of me could not be bothered waiting for the lights to change.

They just turned left down the ring road through a red light.

Then, even worse, at the next junction they wanted to turn right, off the ring road, down the A4124 Wednesfield Way. Again, they just decided to go through a red light, across the ring road traffic. I could not believe what I was seeing.

S HARRIS
New Invention

Don't fall for the lies on Corbyn

I WOULD like to thank J Davenport for his/her support for Jeremy Corbyn. It is nice to read a letter from someone who does not believe the lies printed by the right-wing press and the tabloids.

I cannot see Mr Corbyn is any worse than the politicians we have been stuck with over the past three decades.

David Cameron and his crowd are completely indifferent to the suffering that their cuts have caused.

The pitiful excuses made by the paymaster general, Matthew Hancock, on Question Time in response to the mother of a young man with a learning disability show how out of touch politicians in general are with the electorate.

I am not at all fooled by Mr Hancock's claim that the reason for the cuts is to ensure that the country can afford to support future generations. That's merely a justification for callousness and inhumanity. If Jeremy Corbyn is still the leader of the Labour Party in 2020 I will consider voting for him, as at least he stands by his principles.

S FLANAGAN
Aldridge

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POST

Walsall Chronicle,
Chronicle Editorial,
51-53 Queen Street
Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES

EMAIL

walsall.chron@
expressandstar.co.uk

Letters should be brief and MUST include name, address and telephone number. The Editor reserves the right to condense letters.

Empty promises by leader over results

WALSALL Primary schools are among the worst in the country currently, dropping to 143rd from 150 in England. It's that time of year again. The time of the empty statement from an education leader, commenting on another poor school report card from Ofsted.

Sadly, if anyone researched the last 15 years at least, of local media you would find the same deeply disappointing recycled statements. Which is remarkable as in London there has been a huge turnaround in school improvements.

Why not in Walsall? As regular as the winter darkness Walsall invests in new leaders, new committee structures, but the same politicians. They all have one thing in common, they haven't worked. 143rd is a very low attainment level for all involved. When will people believe it is with

quality headteachers and teachers that change can be delivered?

No one factor can be credited for success in the London improvements but school leadership was key.

Schools require a focus on data and, data literacy, a culture of responsibility, a professional working culture and highly effective and led professional development, not hollow statements from distant education leaders. Quality counts, find it, pay for it, teach it, keep it.

Parents and carers have every right to be appalled, disappointed and angry about Walsall schools' latest report card score. Walsall must have an education revolution led by parents and carers. Local schools need to be invigorated by our parents on behalf of our children.

CLLR DOUG JAMES
Walsall

On song for fundraising

WILLENHALL Singers (formerly Willenhall Musical Society) are pleased to announce that a cheque for £1,775 was presented to Helen Murray from Macmillan Nurses on Monday December 7.

The money was raised mostly, from our Charity Concert on October 17 at Sneyd Community Centre.

It included a generous donation of £70 from Streetly Methodist Church. Thank you to our audience and everyone who helped make the event successful, including advertisers and donors.

ANNE LANGLEY
Willenhall Singers



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Reward after raid nets £35k from firm



Accounts manager Samantha Hale at Strongs Memorials in Bloxwich, where a safe was stolen and recovered empty

THIEVES smashed a hole in the roof of a funeral directors before stealing a safe containing £35,000 in cash.

Devastated staff at Strongs Memorials in Bloxwich have been left shocked by how well-organised the burglary was.

Owner Andrew Walsh has since put up a £5,000 reward for anyone who can provide any information which results in the culprits being convicted.

Accounts manager Samantha Hale arrived to discover the business had been broken into on the morning of Friday December 4. She said: "I came in and saw some plaster on the floor

and just thought maybe we were having some work done or something.

"It didn't occur to me at first what had happened then I noticed the safe was gone. I went into the next room and there was a hole in the roof. I was really shook up. The safe is really heavy it must have taken three or four people to get it up."

A number of factors have led staff to believe the break-in was well-planned, including the precise location of the where the roof was smashed and the fact that no fingerprints were left.

They also believe the culprits tampered with the CCTV system at the

premises wiping any recording. The safe was discarded in a nearby garden and has since been recovered albeit without the £35,000 which was inside.

Fortunately the company is insured and they have reassured customers who have booked funerals and other services that they will not be affected.

Ms Hale said: "Everyone's orders will still be done. This is one of the busiest times of year and we have just got to keep going. The nature of the business is not the kind where you can let customers down." Anyone with information should call Walsall Police on 101 or Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

NHS

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Feeling ill over Christmas and can't wait to see your GP?

A GP service is available from 8am to 8pm on Christmas Day, Bank Holiday Monday (28 December) and New Year's Day at:

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D-Day veteran Stanley's wait for medal continues

HE risked his life for his country by fighting on Sword Beach during the notorious D-Day landings.

But months after notifying the Ministry of Defence, Second World War veteran Stanley Harris from Walsall has yet to receive confirmation of whether he will be recognised for his bravery.

In recent weeks the 93-year-old of St Michael's Close, Aldridge, has watched on as other British survivors, including former soldiers from the borough, have received their Legion D'Honneur medals – the commendation introduced by the French government in 2014 to mark the 70th anniversary of the Normandy landings.

His family submitted the required paperwork on his behalf in July but four months on they have yet to even receive any acknowledgement from the MoD.

Son-in-law William Carlon, aged 54, from Burton, said: "I'm a 6ft bloke and reading about what he went through brings tears to my eyes. He doesn't talk about it much, but he is a very proud man and we are all very proud of him. He has asked how long it will be before he gets his medal and has said 'will I get it before I go?'"

"We've seen a lot of people get theirs and just think it would be nice if he was recognised." Mr Harris joined the air force in 1940 but six months later was transferred to the Army.

Like many soldiers he was posted to various parts of the country before learning he would be part of Operation Overlord – the largest amphibious military operation in history which saw more than 150,000 Allies land on the coast of France's Normandy region which was heavily fortified by German troops. It was during these sieges where Mr Harris was nearly killed



Normandy veteran Stanley Harris



Stanley seen in Trieste, Italy, 1945



Another view of Stan in Belgium

after an enemy soldier jumped into the trenches and stabbed him in the arm with a bayonet, only for his sergeant to come to his rescue.

After the Allies seized control of Normandy he served with the 184 Field Park Company rebuilding the roads and transporting equipment



and supplies to the front lines. Following his release from the Army in late 1945 Mr Harris married wife Margaret a year later who has since passed away. The father-of-two, grandfather and great-grandfather has worked for engineering firms including Aldridge-based company Birlick.

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Boy punched and forced to kiss shoes of 'bully'

A ROBBER forced a terrified teenager to kiss his shoe after punching him three times in the face.

Judge James Bearbridge described Wayne Kendall as a 'bully and a menace to society'.

Wolverhampton Crown Court heard Kendall, aged 18, shockingly threatened a young girl that if she called police he would 'cut her up' and send her back to her mother in the mail.

Kendall, of Slacky Lane, Walsall, appeared from a young offenders institute via videolink and pleaded guilty to two charges of robbery and assault with intent to rob. He was sentenced to three-and-a-half years in a young offenders institute.

Prosecutor Stefan Kolodynski said Kendall's attack on Paige Green, aged 15 and Jordan Lewis, 16, took place at a bus stop in Darlaston on October 17.

"Kendall was riding past on his bike when Miss Green and Mr Lewis were engaged in banter, during which Miss Green told Mr Lewis to 'f*** off'."

Kendall heard this and took it as an excuse to challenge them.

"He started bullying them, he said 'I own these streets and I'll hunt you down.'"

"He punched Jordan in the face and tried to get Paige's phone off her. He then challenged Jordan to a fight, punching him a second time while Paige was standing nearby. He said to her: 'I know your family, if you call the police I'll cut you up and send you back to your mother in the mail.'"

"He punched Jordan in the face once more before ordering him to kiss his shoes, saying if he didn't he would stab him. He held him down and forced him to kiss one of his trainers. He then said to the pair: 'I know you both, I'll stab you', before riding off on his bike."

Miss Green said in a victim statement, she was scared to go into town and now rarely goes out. She said she feared that she will be attacked every time someone goes past her on a bike. In defence, Mr Anthony Bell said Kendall has an alcohol problem, and was under the influence when he committed the offences.

It was only a soldier's tale



Author Gary Taylor of Great Barr, with his book A Soldier's Tale

AN engineer has written inspired by a chance meeting with a war veteran. Gary Taylor has pledged to donate half of any money he makes from the book sales to charity.

It was while shopping that Mr Taylor got talking to an elderly man emblazoned with medals who was selling poppies. The 55-year-old, from Great Barr, said:

"A couple of years back I was coming out of Asda and there was this old fella sat there with so many medals he could trip over."

"We got into conversation and he said 'you wouldn't believe half

the tales of these' and that got me thinking. Two years later the book was published."

Although Mr Taylor never saw the man again, or even knew his name, his book was based loosely around him. A Soldier's Tale is the story of a man in a supermarket selling poppies recounting his stories during the war.

The book is on sale on Amazon and at Waterstones and other leading book stores, with 50 per cent of the proceeds to be directed to the Royal British Legion. Mr Taylor has previously written two thrillers.

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Your Christmas Rubbish and Recycling arrangements 2015/16

Changes to your rubbish bin collection service (grey bin)

Normal collection day	Your next collection will be
Friday 25 December 2015	Monday 28 December with 3 extra bags of rubbish
Monday 28 December 2015	Monday 4 January with 3 extra bags of rubbish
Friday 1 January 2016	Friday 8 January 2016 with 3 extra bags of rubbish

For operational reasons, extra bags of rubbish will be collected by a different crew.

Changes to your recycling bin collection service (green bin)

Normal collection day	Your next collection will be
Friday 25 December 2015	Monday 28 December 2015
Monday 28 December 2015	Monday 4 January 2016
Friday 1 January 2016	Friday 8 January 2016

For operational reasons no extra bags of recycling will be collected, please check our top 20 list to see what can go in your green recycling bin.

Your garden waste collection service (brown bin)

There will be no garden waste collections from Friday 20 November 2015 until week commencing Monday 4 April 2016. Please check your bin collection calendar for your first brown bin collection of the spring. Alternatively contact us on the details below.

Your local tips – extra opening hours

Local tips (Household Waste Recycling Centres) will be closed on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day. We are opening for two additional days, one at each site to help with increased demand over the holiday period.

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Tue 22 Dec	✓	X
Wed 23 Dec	✓	X
Thu 24 Dec	X	✓
Fri 25 Dec	X	X
Sat 26 Dec	X	X
Sun 27 Dec	✓	✓
Mon 28 Dec	✓	✓
Tue 29 Dec	✓	✓
Wed 30 Dec	✓	✓
Thu 31 Dec	E	E
Fri 1 Jan	X	X
Sat 2 Jan	✓	✓
Sun 3 Jan	✓	✓

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Standing proud to honour the Fallen



The Barr Beacon War Memorial seen in all its glory, in the morning sun, at the popular beauty spot

IT stands proud on top of the hill, honouring those who lost their lives in conflicts around the world.

Barr Beacon's landmark war memorial looks picture perfect in the morning sun. The monument is transformed into a silhouette, with bright blue skies above and just a few clouds as the sun begins to rise.

The memorial pays homage to servicemen and women who have lost their lives throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Where the memorial is situated at the beauty spot, is one of the highest points in the West Midlands. It boasts views on a clear

day that can stretch from Wales and Shropshire in the west and Staffordshire in the north, to Warwickshire in the east and Birmingham in the south. Such sights as The Wrekin, Cannock Chase, the Lickey Hills, Lichfield Cathedral, Aldridge Airport and Birmingham city centre can be seen.

Sadly, Barr Beacon's recent history has been less favourable, as the war memorial has been repeatedly targeted by metal thieves who have stripped the copper dome off the much-loved monument. In November 2014, the memorial was rededicated in front of dignitaries and schoolchildren.

They were joined by Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant, Mr Paul Sabapathy, Colonel Tom Lloyd, chairperson of the military deputy lieutenant group and the Mayor of Walsall, Councillor Pete Smith. The war memorial dates back to 1933 and is made of Portland stone.

The roof used to be made of copper, but after spates of theft and vandalism, the dome was restored with zinc.

Inside the memorial is a pedestal which used to house a mounted 'direction-finder' or topographic disk.

The original 1920 disk was destroyed during the war, and there have been several versions since.

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Shemiah Browne with Nathan Byrne and Matt Doherty



Bright Enohahare and Sheyi Ojo with Harvey Martin

Wolves players do the rounds in hospital visit



Jessica Flowers, aged four, Penn meets goalkeeper Jon Flatt



Nathan Byrne and Benik Afobe greet Mateo George and dad Syiah



Fan Jack Spragg with Bjorn Sigurdarson and Jordan Graham



Wolves players with Stuart Craggs and baby Issac



Wolves players, Patricia Murray and Lilian Smith



Roy Gaskin of Wombourne cheered up by the players

HOSPITAL patients were treated to a surprise visit by Wolverhampton Wanderers players.

Members from the first team and the under 21 side visited patients at New Cross – including those on the Deanesley ward, children's unit and maternity – and handed out gifts.

The club arranges the visit each year to give patients going through a difficult time a chance to meet the players and to brighten up their day.

Defender Matt Doherty lauded the heroics of the staff at the hospital. He said: "I have got so much respect for the staff with all the things that they do, they are heroes really to these patients. The things they do though we take for granted almost."

Humble

Striker Benik Afobe said: "It is nice to come and see people in the hospital here and hopefully they can all get better. It is sad to see."

"We don't know a lot that goes on because all we do is train and work hard, and go home and see our friends and family."

"There is just so much going on in the world and it makes you humble to see and the looks on their faces when they see us you know."

"The work that the staff do sometimes goes unnoticed, with all the hours they put in and the late shifts."

The players that visited New Cross Hospital were Benik Afobe, Matt Doherty, Sheyi Ojo, Jordan Graham, Nathan Byrne, Bjorn Sigurdarson, Bright Enohahare, Declan Weeks, Callum Harris, Jonathan Flatt and Sylvain Deslandes.



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Stereophonics are rock solid

GIG REVIEW

by Leon Burakowski

Stereophonics, Genting Arena
THE day after sharing the NEC stage with mega stars at the BBC Music Awards, rockers Stereophonics were back in the spotlights at the Genting Arena.

This time it was in front of thousands of fans who had come purely to see them and enjoy probably the best, down-to-earth no nonsense melodic rock band on the live circuit.

This was a special night for the five-piece built around the Welsh core of guitarist and singer Kelly Jones, with his inimitable sandpaper and velvet vocals, and bassist Richard Jones, who looks like a throwback to the rockabilly era. It was a gig sandwiched between adding rock muscle to the BBC show and a triumphant homecoming at Cardiff on Saturday night.

For Kelly, in his usual jeans and leather bomber jacket, it was extra special because in the days when Cardiff lacked a big venue the NEC was where he saw his rock heroes, such as AC/DC. He recalled an Aerosmith concert when he was "just two rows from the (expletive) back". Kelly praised Brum's rock pedigree, Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath, and remembered Birmingham gigs at small venues such as Moseley's Jug of Ale.

Stereophonics have released nine albums in 19 years. It was the early albums and two latest, Graffiti On The Train and Keep The Village Alive, that provided the sources for this 26-song, two and quarter hour gig.

They were out of the blocks at top speed with exhilarating rocker C'est La Vie from Keep The Village Alive and kept up the momentum with I



Stereophonics played for more than two hours at the Genting Arena, Birmingham

Wanna Get Lost With You, Superman, Vegas Two Times, More Life In A Tramp's Vest and Have A Nice Day.

The band, completed by Birmingham guitarist Adam Zindani, drummer Jamie Morrison and keyboardist Tony Kirkham, were joined by violinists and a cellist which added lush, epic dimension to Indian Summer, Graffiti On The Train, Roll The Dice, Violins and Tambourines, and their hit cover of Handbags and Gladrags. The latter was written by Manfred Mann's Mike D'Abo who Kelly revealed had thanked

him after their cover version paid for his conservatory.

That honey and whisky voice of Kelly Jones, the major reason why Stereophonics have as many female as male fans, was showcased by his acoustic version of Traffic and, at the piano, the raw Sunny from the new album. After Local Boy In The Photograph, the band returned for four encores including their anthem Maybe Tomorrow and biggest hit Dakota.

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Hall End Methodist Church Sunday School's entry in the West Bromwich Carnival of July 1, 1967. The church, at Hall End, which dates from 1902, closed on June 28, 2009. This photograph is used courtesy of T.J.H. Price



A rare look inside Christian Spiritualist Church, Whitehall Road opposite Farley Street in June 1959. By 1970 the property was demolished. Photo courtesy of Ron Jones



Archibald Kenrick and Sons' employees' children's Christmas party from around 1956. Among those pictured are Royston Hunt, Ken Wooding, John Beighton and Colin Evetts. The photo is thanks to Ken Wooding

Monuments mark 250 years of town's history as an industrial powerhouse

WEST Bromwich was as much a product of the Industrial Revolution as was the factory system, steam power, and the sub-division of labour.

According to Frederick Hackwood, it was 'the Chicago of Modern England' because it had developed as rapidly as a recently settled American city, while the American observer Elihu Burritt praised West Bromwich as 'a place of much vigour and growth'.

As a new town it emerged swiftly from heathland soon after the Napoleonic Wars. Focused on its High Street, it quickly eclipsed in size and importance the nearby older hamlets like Hill Top and Overend.

Yet for all its importance, West Bromwich has not figured prominently in the work of academic historians, and a comprehensive history of the town awaits to be written.

By contrast, the people's history of West Bromwich has been ably and well served

MEMORY LANE

Report by Carl Chinn

by Terry Price. Terry is an assiduous researcher into the history of the town and of Great Bridge and is the author of several outstanding books on both places.

Through them he has raised large sums of money for good causes locally.

His new book is called 'West Bromwich Remembered' and in the introduction he writes: "West Bromwich has a number of monuments within its borders celebrating people and events previously associated with the borough over the last 250 years.

"The most impressive of these can be found at Carters Green, where a magnificent clock tower was erected in 1897, by public subscription, to honour the town's first and five-times Mayor, Alderman Reuben Farley JP. Dartmouth Square has an ornamental drinking fountain which was provided by the aforementioned gentleman in 1885 as a memorial to his mother, Eliza-

beth Farley. The town's first war memorial was unveiled in 1919 outside the Victory Club at 64 Upper High Street, previously a children's private school known as The Elms.

"This First World War cenotaph, which now stands in Heath Lane Cemetery, was financed solely by the local ex-servicemen returning from the 1914-18 conflict.

"In 2006 the humanitarian and acting achievements of West Bromwich-born Hollywood star Madeleine Carroll were officially recognised by the borough council when a 2 metre-high granite public work of art was erected in front of the new Arts Centre in New Street.

"The Pauper Memorial in Heath Lane Cemetery, erected in 2008, commemorates all those buried in public graves who by law could not have a headstone of their own. This memorial provides a focus for relatives who have no identifiable place to pay their respects. Its inscription reads: 'This memorial stands in recognition of the people who passed through the workhouse system and

to the memory of all those buried in unmarked pauper graves'.

"The 'Cross in Hand' bronze sculpture in front of Wesley Methodist Church on the High Street is dedicated to John Wesley, Methodist preacher and religious reformer, who on 9 January 1743 formed the first Methodist Society in Staffordshire at Crabb's Mill Farm, Holloway Bank, Hill Top. The sculpture was originally unveiled in Duchess Parade on 23 October 1989. It was transferred to its present location and rededicated on 9 May 2013.

"In West Bromwich Central Library there is a brass plaque dedicated to seismologist John Johnson Shaw CBE (1873-1948), who after constructing his own improved seismograph in 1908, went on to pioneer research in microseismology.

"Although his first experiments were conducted in the cellar of his Hill Top premises, from 1910 he carried out much of his work in the basement of his new home at Sunnyside, 77a Birmingham Road, West Bromwich."



The unveiling of West Bromwich's first war memorial, at the Victory Club (or The Elms), 64 High Street, in 1919. All photos are from 'West Bromwich Remembered'; this one is thanks to Margaret Little

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Fun is all around in Marti's magic role

BIRMINGHAM Hippodrome's spectacular pantomime Aladdin is a star-studded extravaganza that bills itself as not only the Midlands' best panto but Britain's biggest!

This year's glittering line-up stars Wet Wet Wet singer Marti Pellow as Abanazar, Julian Clary as the Slave of the Ring, and West End star Lee Mead as Aladdin. Returning by popular demand is funnyman Matt Slack, this time as Wishee Washee, and Andrew Ryan plays the Dame for the 25th time as Widow Twankey.

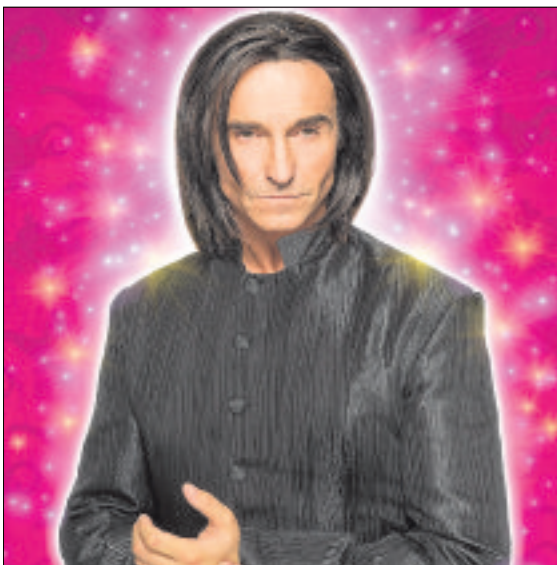
The show is packed with sensational special effects including a magical 3D flying carpet ride, laugh-out-loud comedy, and an Aladdin's cave of lavish sets and costumes.

Julian Clary is an old hand at the panto format. He was at Wolverhampton's Grand Theatre last year and will raise laughs with his double entendres.

For Pellow it will be a new experience, but he said he didn't think twice when asked to star, saying: "I have this thing at the end of each year when a lot of my friends in the theatre tell me they're off to do a panto.

"I've never done one before, it had never been on my list. I remember panto as a kid and I loved it; that was in the days of Stanley Baxter.

"Then I was approached by Michael Harrison, the MD of Qdos. We'd worked together on The Witches of Eastwick. He said I'd be perfect for the part of Abanazar. The pantos that Michael put on are all 'wow'. So, to be part of it is a no-brainer.



Pellow talk — 1980s pop star turns panto villain in Brum's big panto show

"I've not been to a panto since my youth. But those memories from my youth were phenomenal. I would be right up at the back at the King's Theatre (Glasgow) and they were magic. It was total escapism. That's

the beauty of theatre, that's the beauty of the story of Aladdin."

Aladdin opens on Saturday and continues until January 31. See www.birminghamhippodrome.com or call 0844 338 5000.

Carols and the classics

NO venues throw themselves more wholeheartedly into the Christmas spirit than Birmingham Town Hall and Symphony Hall. Guest hosts including Alan Titchmarsh and Aled Jones (pictured left) will lead the festivities as the city concert venues host a feast of carols and seasonal classical music.

The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra's Festive Favourites concerts are as much a part of Brum's celebrations as the German Market and the Hippodrome panto. TV personality Alan Titchmarsh is the guest host for three evening concerts on Friday, Sunday and Monday, plus a 3pm matinee on Sunday. Conducted by Simon Halsey and joined by CBSO associates, this will be a joyous start to the season.

On Saturday at Symphony Hall it's Christmas with Aled Jones as the Welsh singer and presenter leads carols, backed by the City of Birmingham Choir and London Concert Orchestra, and special guests. Ghost stories are traditional at this time of year and on Sunday Clive Andrews recreates the night at the Town Hall in December 1853 when Charles Dickens himself read A Christmas Carol to a spellbound audience.

Jonathan Cohan leads a Christmas Carol Singalong at Symphony Hall on Monday at 2.30pm, joined by special guest West End star Louise Dearman. It's Carols by Candlelight when the Mozart Festival Chorus and Orchestra, in period costume, perform on Tuesday evening. White Christmas on Wednesday is a feast of festive music featuring singers Jacinta Whyte and Tim Howard with Capital Voices and London Concert Orchestra at Symphony Hall. The orchestra returns at 2.30pm the next day for Christmas Eve Classics with Birmingham Choral Union and Four Oaks Cluster Choir.

To book see www.thsh.co.uk or call 0121 345 0600.

West End performer returns with concert

A FORMER amateur performer from Lichfield who has found success on the London stage is returning to the West Midlands for a special show.

Cameron Sharp, who now lives in London, has appeared in the hit musical Rock of Ages in the West End and on tour but tomorrow (Fri) returns home with an evening of swing, soul and musical theatre tunes at the Arena Theatre in Wolverhampton. He will be accompanied by an 18-piece band. The Infinity Jazz Orchestra. Guest singers and friends will also join him for a performance that's also likely to include some festive sparkle.

Tickets are £18, call 01902 321321.

Justin is back for a brand new Purpose

TEEN pop sensation Justin Bieber has announced two concert dates at Birmingham city centre's Barclaycard Arena next autumn.

The Canadian singer will be performing at the venue on October 17 and 18 with tickets starting from £56.95 (plus fee) up to £135.70.

Tickets were going on general sale from 9am today (Thursday, December 17) from www.theticketfactory.com website.

The 21-year-old star has reached the no1 chart spot in more than 100 countries with his new album Purpose, featuring the massive hit song What Do You Mean.

Blast Off with the Neds at Civic gig

ONE of the best party atmospheres is likely to be at Wolverhampton Civic Hall on Saturday when Stourbridge band Ned's Atomic Dustbin have organised the inaugural Kill Your Television Festival, and will play their first new song in 21 years.

The Neds have performed numerous sell-out shows at the venue in recent years. Frontman Jonn Penney said: "Ever since we reformed with all five original members in 2006 we have entertained the idea of writing new songs." The gig will also feature The Wedding Present, The Primitives and Eat, plus a return for legendary indie club night Blast Off.

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CHOICE



Claudia Winkleman

Strictly Come Dancing Grand Final (BBC1, 6.35pm)

The four couples gather one last time for the 2015 Grand Final. Tensions are high as the celebrities and their partners face yet more turns on the dance-floor. Tonight, the contestants will be hoping the judges will be kind with more than just their scores, as Len Goodman, Darcey Bussell, Craig Revel Horwood and Bruno Tonioli will also be deciding which of the stars' previous routines will be revisited in the first of tonight's dances. For their second performance, the duos must dazzle both the panel and the audience at home with their 'show dance'. Once all eight routines are complete, the phone lines will open, giving viewers a chance to decide which of the competitors will be progressing through to the final three.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **10.00** Saturday Kitchen Live. **11.30** James Martin - Home Comforts at Christmas. (R) **12.00** BBC News: Weather. **12.10** Football Focus. **12.55** Sports Personality - The Final 12. (R) **1.55** Film: The Muppets. (2011) Comedy, starring Jason Segel. **3.30** The Hunt. (R) **4.30** Final Score. **5.25** BBC News. **5.35** Regional Programme. **5.45** Pointless Celebrities.

6.35 **Strictly Come Dancing Grand Final.** The remaining four couples gather one last time for the 2015 Grand Final. Tensions are high as, after 13 weeks of performances, the celebrities and their professional partners face yet more turns on the dance-floor. Tonight, the contestants will be hoping the judges will be kind with more than just their scores, as Len Goodman, Darcey Bussell, Craig Revel Horwood and Bruno Tonioli will also be deciding which of the stars' previous routines will be revisited in the first of tonight's dances. For their second performance, the duos must dazzle both the panel and the audience at home with their 'show dance'. Once all eight routines are complete, the phone lines will open, giving viewers a chance to decide which of the competitors will be progressing through to the final three.

8.00 **Casualty.** Christmas Eve arrives, and a nervous Cal goes to meet his birth mother. Meanwhile, Dixie learns her superiors are investigating Jess's complaint.

8.50 **The National Lottery Live.** Frankie Bridge of The Saturdays joins Ore Oduba to push the Lotto button as the all-important winning numbers are revealed.

9.00 **Strictly Come Dancing: The Results.** The final three couples revisit their favourite routines in the last round of performances, before viewers decide which star should be named the champion. Last in the series.

10.10 **BBC News: Weather.**

10.30 **Match of the Day.** Highlights of the latest games, including Manchester United v Norwich City and Everton v Leicester City. National Lottery Update.

11.55 **The Apprentice.** The five remaining candidates must face the interview process. (R)

12.55 **Weather for the Week Ahead.** **1.00** BBC News.

BBC2

6.00 Race to Super Bowl 50. (R) **6.50** Homes Under the Hammer. (R) **7.45** Africa's Fishing Leopards: Natural World. (R) **8.45** Film: Underdog. (2007) **10.00** Film: Bridge to Terabithia. (2007) **11.30** Escape to the Country. (R) **12.00** Best Christmas Bakes Ever. **12.45** Film: The Bishop's Wife. (1947) Fantasy, starring Cary Grant. **2.30** Film: Splash! (1984) Romantic fantasy comedy, with Tom Hanks and Daryl Hannah. **4.10** Flog It! **5.00** Film: Dad's Army. (1971) British comedy, starring Arthur Lowe.

6.35 **The Perfect Morecambe & Wise Christmas Special.** Compilations each featuring a selection of classic sketches and routines from the comedy duo's shows. (R)

7.05 **Japan: Earth's Enchanted Islands.** Life on Japan's northernmost island Hokkaido, a place where tough animals and ingenious people have adapted to the extremes of the seasons. Last in the series. (R)

8.05 **Porridge.** Mackay and Barraclough discover Fletch is making booze in his cell and the crafty con seems certain to spend Christmas in solitary. Festive special from 1976, with Ronnie Barker. (R)

8.50 **Rudolf Nureyev - Dance to Freedom.** Dramatised documentary detailing the story of Rudolf Nureyev, the Soviet ballet dancer who defected to the West in 1961, becoming a living legend in the process. Bolshoi Ballet star Artem Ovcharenko steps into Nureyev's slippers, recreating the Kirov Ballet company's 1961 European tour, which provided the dancer with the opportunity to defect at Paris's Le Bourget airport on June 16.

10.20 **QI XL.** Jenny Eclair, Johnny Vegas and Bill Bailey join regular panellist Alan Davies for an extended edition of the quiz show, in which host Stephen Fry offers up seasonal merriment.

11.05 **The Rise of James Brown: Mr Dynamite.** Documentary charting the singer's journey from impoverished beginnings to becoming one of the biggest names in music, and revealing his pivotal role in the civil rights movement. (R)

12.45 **Film: SoulBoy.** (2010) Drama, starring Martin Compston, Felicity Jones and Nicola Burley. **2.05** This Is BBC Two.

ITV

6.00 CITY: Fort Boyard Ultimate Challenge. **6.25** Pat & Stan. (R) **6.30** Pat & Stan. (R) **6.35** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **7.00** Signed Stories: Share a Story. (R) **7.05** Oddbods. (R) **7.10** Sooty. (R) **7.25** Super 4. (R) **7.40** Mr Bean: The Animated Series. (R) **7.50** Mr Bean: The Animated Series. (R) **8.00** The Aquabats! Super Show! (R) **8.30** Thunderbirds Are Go. **9.00** Jessie. **9.25** Murder, She Wrote. (R) **10.20** The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R) **11.20** ITV News: Weather. **11.30** Film: The Mirror Crack'd. (1980) **1.35** Celebrity Squares. (R) **2.15** Doc Martin. (R) **3.15** Midsummer Murders. (R) **5.10** Regional Programme : Weather. **5.20** ITV News: Weather. **5.35** Keep It In the Family Christmas Special.

6.35 **Film: The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey.** (2012) Unassuming hobbit Bilbo Baggins is pulled out of his comfortable life when Gandalf the wizard volunteers him for a dangerous quest. He joins a party of dwarves who go on a mission to reclaim their lost homeland, which has been taken over by a dragon. The first part of Peter Jackson's fantasy adventure trilogy based on J.R.R. Tolkien's novel, starring Martin Freeman, Ian McKellen and Richard Armitage.

9.45 **The Jonathan Ross Show.** The host is given yet another chance to indulge his geek side as he welcomes Harrison Ford to take a seat on the sofa. The veteran Hollywood star will no doubt face a barrage of questions about the making of the highly anticipated Star Wars: The Force Awakens, which hit cinemas on Thursdays last week. Also visiting the studio are David Williams, who is fronting Channel 4's countdown of the nation's favourite children's book this festive season, and Jamie Oliver, whose health-oriented recipe book Everyday Super Food hit shelves back in August. Plus, singer-songwriter Jess Glynne performs.

10.50 **ITV News: Weather.**

11.05 **Film: Notting Hill.** (1999) A London bookshop owner falls for a glamorous Hollywood film star, but intrusive media interest makes for a tricky relationship. Romantic comedy, with Hugh Grant, Julia Roberts, Rhys Ifans and Emma Chambers.

1.20 Jackpot247. **3.00** The Jeremy Kyle Show USA. (R) **3.40** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

6.15 Great Ethiopian Run 2015. **7.10** Survival of the Fittest. **7.35** Snowman Triathlon. **8.00** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **8.30** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **9.00** The Morning Line. **10.00** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **10.30** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **11.00** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **11.30** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **12.00** The Simpsons. (R) **12.30** The Simpsons. (R) **1.00** The Simpsons. (R) **1.30** Channel 4 Racing. **10.00** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **10.30** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **11.00** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **11.30** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **12.00** The Simpsons. (R) **12.30** The Simpsons. (R) **1.00** The Simpsons. (R) **1.30** Channel 4 Racing. **10.00** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **10.30** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **11.00** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **11.30** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **12.00** The Simpsons. (R) **12.30** The Simpsons. (R) **1.00** The Simpsons. (R) **1.30** Channel 4 Racing. **10.00** The Big Bang Theory. 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CHOICE



Kara Tointon

The Sound of Music Live! (ITV, 7.30pm)
You can't beat a bit of The Sound of Music at Christmas - the film version is sure to pop up in the schedules at some point, but ITV is really pushing the boat out by launching a live version of the musical to help celebrate the movie's 50th anniversary. Perhaps the biggest is surprise is the identity of the lead actress - Kara Tointon, who plays novice nun-turned-governess. We know she can act and her dance skills were revealed when she won Strictly Come Dancing in 2010, but can she sing? We'll find out tonight when she takes to the stage alongside West End and Downton Abbey star Julian Ovenden, who portrays Captain Von Trapp. Katherine Kelly, Alexander Armstrong and Mel Giedroyc also appear.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. 7.35 Match of the Day. (R) **9.00 The Andrew Marr Show.** 10.00 Fern Britton Meets Baroness Brady. **11.00 Homes Under the Hammer.** (R) **12.00 Bargain Hunt.** (R) **1.00 BBC News.** Weather. **1.15 Film:** Rise of the Guardians. (2012) Animated adventure, with the voice of Chris Pine. **2.40 Merry Madagascar.** (R) **3.05 Film:** Toy Story 3. (2010) Animated adventure, with the voices of Tom Hanks and Tim Allen. **4.45 The Christmas Big Sing.** **5.25 BBC News.** **5.40 Regional Programme.** **5.50 Countryfile:** Cornish Coastal Christmas. **6.50 Sports Personality of the Year 2015.** Gary Lineker, Clare Balding and Gabby Logan present this year's ceremony live from the SSE Arena in Belfast, where the successor to Lewis Hamilton will be crowned. Hamilton himself is among the 12 contenders, and will be hoping to land back-to-back wins at this ceremony, having delivered another Formula 1 world title in 2015 to maintain his recent dominance of the sport. The other nominees are world champion athletes Jessica Ennis-Hill, Mo Farah and Greg Rutherford, Davis Cup hero Andy Murray, footballer Lucy Bronze, newly crowned world heavyweight champion Tyson Fury, cyclists Chris Froome and Lizzie Armitstead, swimmer Adam Peaty, gymnast Max Whitlock and former Leeds Rhinos captain Kevin Sinfield - the first-ever candidate from rugby league. In addition, awards will be handed out in categories such as Team of the Year, Coach of the Year and Unsung Hero, and the Helen Rollason Award will be bestowed upon someone who epitomises courage and has the ability to inspire others. **9.00 The Apprentice.** The finalists must launch their business in the final task, including creating a brand and unveiling their campaign to an audience of industry experts. Last in the series. **11.00 BBC News.** **11.20 Regional Programme.** **11.30 Have I Got a Bit More News for You.** Compilation of the satirical quiz, looking back at the big news events of 2015, with team captains Ian Hislop and Paul Merton, and guest hosts and panellists. Last in the series. **12.10 Weather for the Week Ahead.** **12.15 BBC News.**

BBC2

6.15 Big Dreams Small Spaces. (R) **7.15 Countryfile.** (R) **8.15 An Island Parish:** Falklands. (R) **8.45 Natural World:** Beavers Behaving Badly. (R) **9.45 Saturday Kitchen Best Bites.** **11.15 Simply Nigella Christmas Special.** (R) **12.15 MOTD Extra.** **1.00 Hide-It!** (R) **1.45 Equestrian:** Olympia. **4.30 Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em.** (R) **5.20 Flog It!** **6.25 The Good Life.** Margo and Jerry are forced to spend Christmas with Tom and Barbara. Seasonal special from 1977. (R) **6.50 Christmas University Challenge.** New series. Jeremy Paxman chairs the first in a series of special festive edition of the quiz, with famous graduates of University College London and the University of Birmingham. **7.20 To the Manor Born: 25th Anniversary Special.** Christmas revival from 2007. Audrey prepares to celebrate her wedding anniversary, but finds the event threatened by secrets from her husband's past and her feckless nephew. (R) **8.20 Film: Safe Haven.** (2013) Premiere. A woman trying to make a fresh start in a coastal town realises she must confront the dark past she is running from. Romantic drama, with Julianne Hough and Josh Duhamel. **10.10 Live! the Apollo Christmas Special 2015.** Nina Conti hosts a special festive edition of the stand-up show from the Hammersmith Apollo, featuring Tanyalee Davis, Hal Crutten and Josh Widdicombe. Last in the series. **10.55 Family Guy.** Peter, Joe, Cleveland and Quagmire help throw Jesus an important birthday party. Animation following the misadventures of America's disaster-prone Griffin family. (R) **11.15 The Jayvone Prince Show.** The actor pokes fun at the more ridiculous elements of modern life via stand-up performances, comedy sketches and music. (R) **11.45 Country Strife: Abz on the Farm.** Former boy band member Abz Love and his girlfriend Vicky Fallon try to start their own smallholding in Wales. (R) **12.15 Special Forces - Ultimate Hell Week.** (R) **2.15 Sign Zone:** Countryfile. (R) **3.15 Holby City.** (R) **4.15 James Martin - Home Comforts at Christmas.** (R) **4.55 This is BBC Two.**

ITV

6.00 CITY: Fort Boyard Ultimate Challenge. **6.25 Pat & Stan.** (R) **6.30 Pat & Stan.** (R) **6.35 Dino Dan:** Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.50 Dino Dan:** Trek's Adventures. (R) **7.00 Signed Stories:** Share a Story. (R) **7.05 Oddbods:** (R) **7.10 Sooty.** (R) **7.25 Super 4.** (R) **7.40 Mr Bean: The Animated Series.** (R) **7.50 Mr Bean: The Animated Series.** (R) **8.00 The Aquabats! Super Show!** (R) **8.30 Lego DC Comics: Batman Be-Leaguered.** (R) **9.00 Jessie.** **9.25 FIA Formula E Championship.** **10.20 The Jeremy Kyle Show.** (R) **11.20 ITV News: Weather.** **11.25 The Jeremy Kyle Show.** (R) **12.30 The Unforgettable Dick Emery.** (R) **1.00 Doc Martin.** (R) **3.00 Midsomer Murders.** (R) **5.00 Tipping Point for Text Santa.** (R) **6.00 Regional Programme:** Weather. **6.15 ITV News: Weather.** **6.30 Jekyll and Hyde.** Robert has no wish to find the monster that is killing wealthy young men, but the trail is too compelling to resist. It leads him to a fight with a beautiful vampire who shocks him with the news that she's his sister, Orla. She also tells him Dance is alive and being rebuilt by eel creatures. Robert is suspicious of a trap and sets a test - if she can turn into a Jekyll he'll believe her. Fantasy adventure, starring Tom Bateman and Wallis Day. **7.30 The Sound of Music Live!** Popular musical The Sound of Music is brought to life on soundstages at London's Three Mills Studio, in a live TV dramatisation of the timeless story of Maria and the von Trapp family. Based on the original, the drama will include classic songs such as How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria, Edelweiss, Do-Re-Mi, My Favourite Things, Climb Ev'ry Mountain, and the title song. Starring Kara Tointon, Julia Ovenden, Katherine Kelly and Alexander Armstrong. **10.05 ITV News: Weather.** **10.20 Film: Love Actually.** (2003) Interlinked tales of several people in search of love. Richard Curtis's romantic comedy, with Hugh Grant, Martine McCutcheon, Emma Thompson, Colin Firth, Bill Nighy and Liam Neeson. **12.45 Jackpot247.** Interactive gaming. **3.00 Motorsport UK.** **3.50 ITV Nightscreen.** Text-based information service. **5.05 The Jeremy Kyle Show.** Guests air their differences. (R)

CHANNEL 4

6.20 The King of Queens. (R) **6.45 The King of Queens.** (R) **7.10 The King of Queens.** (R) **7.35 Everybody Loves Raymond.** (R) **8.00 Everybody Loves Raymond.** (R) **8.30 Frasier.** (R) **9.00 Frasier.** (R) **9.30 Sunday Brunch.** **12.30 The Big Bang Theory.** (R) **12.55 The Big Bang Theory.** (R) **1.25 Film: Hachi: A Dog's Tale.** (2009) Fact-based family drama, starring Richard Gere. **3.15 Film: The Addams Family.** (1991) Black comedy, starring Anjelica Huston. **5.10 Channel 4 News.** **5.30 Ice Age: A Mammoth Christmas.** (R) **6.00 Film: Home Alone.** (1990) A boy has to fend for himself when he is accidentally left behind after his family jets off to Paris for Christmas. The youngster initially enjoys his freedom, but is soon forced to resort to ingenious booby traps to defend the family home from two dim-witted burglars. Comedy, starring Macaulay Culkin, Joe Pesci, Daniel Stern, John Heard, Catherine O'Hara and John Candy. **8.00 Bear Goes Wild with Barack Obama.** Bear Grylls is joined by the US president for his latest adventure. The pair go on a trek across the Alaskan wilderness, travelling through dense forest and glacial outwash to visit the Exit Glacier, where they observe the effects of climate change first hand. Along the way, they climb trees to gather berries and cook salmon on a campfire, sharing their thoughts on family, fears and faith. **9.00 Homeland.** Carrie finds herself with a lead to follow. Penultimate episode of the fifth series of the thriller following a team of CIA agents battling terrorists and problems in their personal lives. Claire Danes stars. **10.00 Gogglebox.** Capturing the households' instant reactions to what they are watching on TV from the comfort of their own sofas. (R) **11.00 Film: Four Christmases.** (2008) A couple struggle to make it through four family Christmases on the same day as they see each of their divorced parents in turn. Comedy, with Vince Vaughn and Reese Witherspoon. **12.40 Film: Airplane!** (1980) Spoof disaster movie, starring Robert Hays. **2.10 Alan Carr: Chatty Man.** (R) **3.05 The Undateables.** Two Weddings and a Baby. (R) **3.55 Four in a Bed.** (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake! Peppa Pig. **6.05 Bananas in Pyjamas.** (R) **6.20 Angelina Ballerina.** (R) **6.30 Bob the Builder.** (R) **6.45 Ticky Toc.** (R) **6.55 Zack and Quack.** **7.05 Roobarb and Custard Too.** (R) **7.15 Make Way for Noddy.** (R) **7.25 Paw Patrol.** (R) **7.40 Little Princess.** (R) **7.50 Pip Ahoy!** (R) **8.05 Blaze and the Monster Machines.** (R) **8.30 Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom.** (R) **8.45 Wanda and the Alien.** (R) **8.55 Toby's Travelling Circus.** (R) **9.10 Jelly Jam.** (R) **9.30 LazyTown.** (R) **9.55 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.** (R) **10.30 Football League Tonight.** (R) **12.00 Film: Surf's Up.** (2007) Animated comedy, with the voice of Jeff Bridges. **1.35 Film: The Christmas Switch.** (2014) Fantasy, starring Brian Krause and Cedric Smith. **3.20 Film: Christmas in the City.** (2013) Premiere. Drama, starring Ashley Williams. **5.05 Film: Pinocchio.** (1940) Disney animated adventure, with the voice of Dick Jones. **6.45 5 News Weekend.** **6.50 Film: Hellboy II: The Golden Army.** (2008) The demon superhero, aided by a team from the Bureau of Paranormal Research and Defence, leads the fight against renegade elf Prince Nuada who is intent on reawakening an unstoppable robot army and bringing about the demise of mankind. Action fantasy sequel directed by Guillermo del Toro, starring Ron Perlman, Selma Blair, Doug Jones and Luke Goss. Edited for language and violence. **9.00 Film: War of the Worlds.** (2005) A divorced father's rare weekend with his two estranged children descends into horror when alien war machines rise from beneath Earth and begin to systematically destroy every human being in their path - leaving the man with the dangerous task of getting his kids to safety. Steven Spielberg's sci-fi thriller, based on HG Wells' novel, with Tim Cruise, Dakota Fanning, Justin Chatwin, Miranda Otto and Tim Robbins. **11.10 Britain's Favourite Christmas Songs.** A countdown of songs guaranteed to make any Christmas party go with a swing, including classics by the Jackson 5, Jona Lewie, Band Aid, the Pogues and Kirsty MacColl, and Slade. (R) **2.05 SuperCasino.** Viewers get the chance to take part in live interactive gaming. **4.00 House Doctor.** (R) **4.25 Make It Big.** (R) **5.45 Angels of Jarm.** (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Three
7.00 First Flight 7.10 Film: G-Force (2009) **8.30 Don't Tell the Bride - Christmas on Ice 9.30 Top Gear: Polar Challenge 10.35 Russell Howard's Good News Extra 11.15 Family Guy 12.00 American Dad! 12.45 Josh 1.15 The Mighty Boosh**

BBC Four
7.00 Blood and Gold: The Making of Spain with Simon Sebag Montefiore **8.00 Westminster Abbey 9.00 Nat King Cole: Afraid of the Dark 10.30 Nina Simone & Me with Laura Mvuka 11.00 Bruce Springsteen: The Ties That Bind 11.55 Bruce Springsteen & The E Street Band: Live From The River Tour 1980**

ITV2
11.45 Keep It in the Family Christmas Special 12.50 You've Been Framed at Christmas! 1.20 Film: Peter Pan (2003) 3.30 Film: Beethoven's Christmas Adventure (2011) 5.20 Catchphrase Christmas Special 6.25 The X Factor Winner's Story 2015 7.30 You've Been Framed at Christmas! 9.15 Celebrity Juice: Christmas Special 12.00 Release the Hounds: Jingle Hell II 1.05 Tricked 2.00 Film: Cirque du Freak: The Vampire's Assistant (2009)

ITV3
11.50 Film: Columbo: It's All in the Game (1993) **1.50 Film:** Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory (1971) **3.55 Clash of the Santas 5.55 Michael Biebi: At Home for Christmas 7.30 Lewis 9.30 Inspector Morse 11.45 A Touch of Frost 1.50 Wycliffe 2.45 On the Buses 3.10 ITV3 Nightscreen 3.40 Emmerdale**

ITV4
11.20 The Car Chasers 11.50 Pawn Stars 1.35 Film: No Name on the Bullet (1959) 3.15 Film: The Apollonia (1966) 5.20 Film: Ice Cold in Alex (1958) 8.00 The Celebrity Chase 9.00 Film: The Interpreter (2005) 11.40 Film: Tin Cup (1996) 2.25 Film: Spider (2002)

E4
12.30 Couples Come Dine with Me 2.35 1.35 Film: No Name on the Bullet (1959) 3.15 Film: The Apollonia (1966) 5.20 Film: Ice Cold in Alex (1958) 8.00 The Celebrity Chase 9.00 Film: The Interpreter (2005) 11.40 Film: Tin Cup (1996) 2.25 Film: Spider (2002)

ITV4
11.20 Porco Rosso (1992) 1.00 Parental Guidance (2012) 3.05 Bride Wars (2009) 4.50 Evolution (2001) 6.50 Men in Black 3 (2012) 9.00 Iron Man 2 (2010) 11.25 Daredevil (2003) 1.30 10 Years (2011) 3.40 Close

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FILM CHOICES

MONDAY

White Christmas, Channel 4, 11.50am

Two nightclub entertainers stage a series of shows to save an old friend's winter resort with the help of a talented singing sister act. Musical, with Bing Crosby and Danny Kaye. (1954)

TUESDAY

Shrek the Third, BBC1, 3.50pm

The bad-tempered ogre finds himself in the unwelcome position of being next in line for the throne. Animated comedy, with the voices of Mike Myers, Cameron Diaz, Justin Timberlake, Eddie Murphy, Antonio Banderas and Rupert Everett. (2007)

WEDNESDAY

Bridget Jones's Diary, ITV, 10.45pm

A single woman begins a new year with resolutions to find love, quit her bad habits and take a step up the career ladder. Romantic comedy based on Helen Fielding's novel, starring Renée Zellweger, Hugh Grant and Colin Firth. (2001)



Bridget Jones's Diary, Wednesday, ITV, 10.45pm

CHRISTMAS EVE

It's a Wonderful Life, Channel 4, 2.15pm

AA suicidal small-town businessman is visited by an angel who tries to change his mind by showing him the good he has done. Fantasy drama, starring James Stewart and Donna Reed. (1946)

CHRISTMAS DAY

The Muppet Christmas Carol, Channel 4, 1.45pm

A miser is encouraged to mend his ways at Christmas when three spirits show him his past, present and what the future holds. Puppet comedy, with Michael Caine and Steven Mackintosh. (1992)

The Wizard of Oz, Channel 5, 3.10pm

Youngster Dorothy Gale is whisked over the rainbow by a tornado into the magical land of Oz, where she inadvertently kills a wicked witch – incurring the wrath of another. Setting out to find the wizard who can show her a way home, she is joined on her journey by a scarecrow, a tin man and a cowardly lion, who all hope their own wishes will be granted. Musical fantasy, with Judy Garland, Ray Bolger, Jack Haley, Bert Lahr and Frank Morgan. (1939)

The birth of a comedy with an army of fans

Who do you think you are kidding Mr Hitler? Whenever the crusty old voice of Bud Flanagan can be heard singing that line, you know that Dad's Army is about to start and what will follow is approximately 25 minutes of mayhem, one-liners and catchphrases from Captain Mainwaring, Sergeant Wilson, Corporal Jones and the rest of the platoon.

Ah yes, those catchphrases... Even now, sentences such as, "You stupid boy," "I'm going to get you Napoleon," "We're doomed" and, of course, "Don't panic!" are still well known – which is probably down to the fact that the Beeb always seems to be repeating the show.

It's actually been 47 years since the boys first donned their uniforms and 38 since they hung them up again, but those nine years in between were full of humour which hasn't dated one little bit.

There's an old saying for authors: Write what you know. Jimmy Perry proved he wasn't a "stupid boy" when he did just that and, along with writing partner David Croft, turned his World

War Two Home Guard experiences into Dad's Army.

"We wrote the show together and it became this huge success," says Perry, with a hint of surprise still in his voice. "I always thought it was a good idea but it totally overwhelmed us. I think the secret was that everything was right. It was one of those rare things. The cast was right, the time and the subject was right."

However, not everybody was as enamoured with the idea – or the actors taking part – as Perry. And now, in this drama, viewers can learn more about how the sitcom was born and eventually made it to our screens against the odds.

The BBC has a good track record when it comes to producing 'making-of' dramas. The Curse of Steptoe, The Road to Coronation Street and An Adventure in Space and Time all received critical acclaim, so there's every reason to believe that the latest in the genre will be just as enthralling. The timing is good too – Dad's Army remains a mainstay of the BBC schedule and a revamped film version is due for release in February.

Paul Ritter and Richard Dormer play Perry and Croft respectively, and the drama takes us from when Perry had the initial idea in 1967 to the broadcast of the first episode a year later.

John Sessions and Julian Sands take the key roles of Arthur Lowe and John Le Mesurier; it's hard to imagine anybody playing the characters those venerable old actors took, but Captain Mainwaring was originally offered to Jon Pertwee, while Le Mesurier only accepted the role of Sgt Wilson because the series was going to be filmed in Norfolk, a county he loved.

Sadly, most of the original cast are no longer with us – only Ian Lavender and Frank Williams (Private Pike and Rev Timothy Farthing respectively) remain. Croft also passed away in 2011.

"I feel a tremendous sense of warmth and sadness that most of those involved are no longer with us," says Perry. "But I also have a sense of pride that I created such a show."

Sarah Alexander, Sally Phillips and Keith Allen also star.



We're Doomed! The Dad's Army Story, Tuesday, BBC2, 9pm

BEST OF THE REST

MONDAY

The John Bishop Christmas Show BBC1, 9pm

The Liverpool comedian returns for his third all-singing, all-dancing, festive extravaganza and is joined on stage at the Lyceum Theatre in London's West End by a selection of the most exciting names in music and comedy. The line-up features music from Australian pop star and actress Kylie Minogue, chart-topping singer-songwriter Jess Glynne and 2009 X Factor runner-up and TV presenter Olly Murs, while the laughs are supplied by comedians Sarah Millican, Danny Bhoy, Tom Allen and Andy Askins.

Bafta Celebrates Downton Abbey ITV, 9pm

Jonathan Ross hosts a star-studded event at London's Richmond Theatre honouring the ITV drama ahead of its final episode on Christmas Day. There are reports from behind the scenes with cast and crew to provide an insight into one of the world's most popular shows, while creator Julian Fellowes takes to the stage to chat about its origins and secrets. Maggie Smith and Hugh Bonneville perform a specially written sketch, there are performances by Kiri Te Kanawa and Julian Ovenden, and Julie Walters presents the award to Fellowes and the cast and crew.

TUESDAY

Luther BBC1, 9pm

With the eponymous detective dogged by ghosts from his past, a cold case might be the key to unlocking a mystery that's tormenting him. Meanwhile, with the cannibalistic serial killer still at large, Benny's hacking skills have revealed a list of hundreds of potential victims. Realising it's all part of a macabre end game, the crime buster is forced to put himself and new colleague Emma into the heart of danger to try and stop the killer. Idris Elba and Laura Haddock head the cast.

WEDNESDAY

Prey

ITV, 9pm

As Murdoch continues with the search for his daughter, he is forced into one last extraordinary mission before Lucy can be freed. But, as a wanted man, it is a near-impossible task, and he must fight to get her to safety before the relentless Reinhardt catches her prey. Concluding instalment of the thriller, following the story of a prison officer who is forced on the run with a young female

prisoner when his daughter is kidnapped. Starring Philip Glenister, Rosie Cavaliero, MyAnna Buring and Nathan Stewart-Jarrett. Last in the series.

CHRISTMAS EVE

Peter Kay: 20 Years of Funny BBC1, 9.05pm

It is nearly 20 years since Peter Kay was named North West Comedian of the Year 1996, beating the likes of Johnny Vegas to the title at a show hosted by Dave Spikey. This one-off hour-long programme looks back at the much-loved comedian and actor's life from his childhood growing up in Bolton, to the places and people who have influenced him. It reveals how Peter began his journey into the world of comedy and his eventual rise to become a household name, playing to a record-breaking 1.2 million fans on his The Tour That Doesn't Tour Tour.



Prey, Wednesday, ITV, 9pm

CHRISTMAS DAY

Downton Abbey – The Finale ITV, 8.45pm

Julian Fellowes bids farewell to the Crawleys with one last festive special, catching up with the Abbey's residents at the tail-end of 1925. Mary endeavours to build bridges, but Edith's secret continues to pose a threat. As Henry settles into the role of husband, scars left by Charlie's death are slow to heal, while Carson struggles to come to terms with developments that prove even he is not invulnerable to change. Spratt's moonlighting venture is threatened by the conniving of Denker, and Daisy may have missed her chance with an admirer.

Our Cilla

ITV, 10.45pm

The death of singer and TV presenter Cilla Black in August 2015 shocked the showbusiness community. In this programme, stars including Ringo Starr, Cliff Richard, Elaine Paige, Christopher Biggins, Paul O'Grady and Lynda La Plante join members of the entertainer's family and other close friends to reveal the woman behind the screen persona. Alongside rare interviews and archive footage, the candid, humorous and surprising insights of the people who knew her best chart the journey of a woman who broke boundaries, both in terms of class and gender.

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Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.

14 24 16 22 24 17 14 20 11 15 20 13

2 22 21 4 10 20

16 26 12 3 13 21 20 3 21

11 3 15 3 3 26 2 10 20

8 20 3 18 2 3 25 15

3 9 20 1 22 23 21 3 6 20

21 15 3

20 22 26 2 20 21 12 20 9 15

22 3 14 20 10 4 2 25

14 16 19 20 26 17 24 3

24 16 17 3 26 5 7 2 21 14

16 25 I 2 2 16 24

22 20 23 3 15 16 19 20 26 11 3 10

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION:

F M Q B P G R E X H D L A

K J C N Z W O Y I T S U V

Double Crossword

Choose either quick or cryptic clues - both fit the same grid.

Cryptic Clues:

Across

7. Make it possible to be lean? (6)
8. This stuff does have importance (6)
10. The team having battled are not in the pavilion (7)
11. Dodge a chasm (5)
12. Not one of the nonentities (4)
13. Filched a wrap (5)
17. Famous king was dunderhead - and greedy (5)
18. See 2 Down
22. Stale to the smallest degree (5)
23. Letters for sending to detached fort? (7)
24. Street abounding with contention (6)
25. His products presumably have the edge (6)

Down

1. About hearty echo (7)
- 2 & 18Ac. By which the chairman sees the actors are elected? (7,4)
3. It's clear learner is in distress (5)
4. Competent enough to do better than clever people (7)
5. Was a candidate, but didn't have a seat (5)
6. She's out of the singles now (5)
9. His trial goes over one's head (4,5)
14. Dog finds mother unyielding (7)
15. Spectacle? (7)
16. Correspondence from landlords? (7)
19. Those who study social division (5)
20. Annoy Henry (5)
21. A drink for the overweight? (5)

1 2 3 4 5 6

7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

Quick Clues:

Across

7. Go back (6)
8. Tremble (6)
10. Speech (7)
11. Counterfeit (5)
12. Cudgel (4)
13. Corn (5)
17. Chute (5)
18. Win (4)
22. Proverb (5)
23. Interpret (7)
24. Ministers (6)
25. Glad (6)

Down

1. Crops (7)
2. Conceited (5-2)
3. Venomous snake (5)
4. Excess (7)
5. Prevent (5)
6. Avarice (5)
9. Licentious (9)
14. Feathers (7)
15. Nonpareil (7)
16. Unity (7)
19. Slap (5)
20. Drive out (5)
21. Reel (5)

Sudoku

4 9 7 2

3 5 6 4

9 6 4 8 3 1

4 1 6

5 6 1 2 9

Fill in the grid below so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS >

5 4 3 1 6 7 9 8 2

2 9 7 4 3 8 6 5 1

1 6 8 5 2 9 3 4 7

9 3 2 6 8 5 1 7 4

7 8 5 3 1 4 2 6 9

4 1 6 7 9 2 8 3 5

6 2 4 8 7 1 5 9 3

3 5 1 9 4 6 7 2 8

8 7 9 2 5 3 4 1 6

LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS: CRYPTIC - Across: 1 Backs; 4 Pulls up; 8 Air one's; 9 Views; 10 Toot; 11 Pickling; 13 Cuff; 14 Post; 16 Obdient; 17 Esau; 20 Naomi; 21 Servant; 22 Settled; 23 Wages. Down: 1 Beat the bounds; 2 Cargo; 3 Sink; 4 Pistil; 5 Love-knot; 6 Special; 7 Post-graduates; 12 Official; 13 Cheroot; 15 Unused; 18 Slang; 19 Crow. QUICK - Across: 1 Ocean; 4 Descend; 8 Jealous; 9 Amiss; 10 Chef; 11 Domineer; 13 Eros; 14 Just; 16 Nauseous; 17 Main; 20 Bravo; 21 Inexact; 22 Element; 23 Dread. Down: 1 Objectionable; 2 Evader; 3 Noon; 4 Despot; 5 Spacious; 6 Evident; 7 Discriminated; 12 Lose hope; 13 Emulate; 15 Quaint; 18 Aware; 19 Herd.

Quiz

1. Which Biblical book mentions 'A land flowing with milk and honey'?
2. In which Shakespeare play does Caliban appear?
3. In which year did Canada adopt a maple leaf emblem for its flag?
4. Which Nazi leader was 'The Butcher of Lyon'?
5. How old was outlaw Clyde Barrow when he died?

6. When is the first day of Ramadan in 2016?
7. Who wrote Northanger Abbey?
8. To which country did Alexander Graham Bell emigrate in 1870?
9. What nationality was composer Dvorak?
10. With which of the arts would you associate Sir Alfred Munnings?

Last week's solutions:

Quiz: 1 Swan-upping; 2 David Copperfield; 3 Egypt; 4 A church; 5 Hyde Park; 6 A bird; 7 Alcazar; 8 Torino; 9 George Harrison; 10 Poland.

Niner: LEGATIONS

Niner

Each number from 1 to 9 represents a different letter. Solve the clues and insert the letters in the appropriate squares to discover a word which uses all nine letters.

2467 gives a school,

98457 gives a school subject,

1352732 gives another school subject.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

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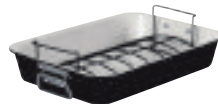
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Christmas period will define run, says Garde

VILLA boss Remi Garde conceded his side's next three games are likely to define their season after his former club Arsenal condemned them to their 15th consecutive Premier League match without victory.

The rock-bottom Villans are eight points adrift of safety – and still six from just climbing one place – having accumulated a mere six points from their opening 16 games of the season.

And with matches to come against relegation rivals Newcastle, Norwich and Sunderland over Christmas, Garde knows his side must start picking up victories, and quickly.

“Probably, we will have to win if we want to be safe,” said Garde, who recalled Jack Grealish to the squad after dropping him for two games for partying after a 4-0 defeat to Everton last month.

“We can still be safe but we are coming into a period where we have to win.

“I see this situation as more of an opportunity than a problem, but we have to be ready. I still believe we are capable of winning the next game.

“I enjoy working in this league.

“We are struggling, I still haven't won a game and I'm very frustrated but I know in football you can change things with work.”

An early penalty decision against right-back Alan Hutton – which referee Kevin Friend deliberated over for several seconds before finally pointing to the spot – set Villa on their way to a club-record 15th consecutive league match without victory.

O'Driscoll is willing to look at Banks's job

FANS' favourite Sean O'Driscoll would be willing to speak to Walsall regarding their vacant manager's job – but has not been approached by the club.

Reports claim the former Doncaster Rovers boss is keen on the vacancy made available following Dean Smith's departure to Brentford. However, the 58-year-old has not submitted a formal application nor has he spoken to any club officials.

O'Driscoll is looking to relaunch his managerial career after leaving high-profile coaching roles with England under-19s and Liverpool. He is friends with former Walsall number two Richard O'Kelly who left with Smith last week.

O'Driscoll and O'Kelly have a close affinity following their successful time together at Doncaster where they won promotion from League One and stabilised the club in the Championship.

And through that relationship, O'Driscoll has watched the Saddlers on numerous occasions this season.

Disruption as weather hits leagues

THE weekend's wet weather cut a swathe through non-league fixtures with numerous matches postponed.

Among them was Rushall Olympic's Evo-Stik Northern Premier game at home to Ilkeston and the First Division One South matches featuring Tivdale, away to Gresley, and Chasetown who were due to play at Basford United.

The West Midlands Regional League also suffered.

The weather hit a host of matches which had to be called off including these Premier Division fixtures: AFC Bridgnorth v Gornal Athletic, Bromyard v Stone Old Alleynians, Black Country Rangers v Willenhall, Dudley Sports v Wolverhampton Casuals, Dudley Town v Smethwick Rangers and Shawbury United v Tipton Town.

Weather washes out main match

THE recent heavy rains forced Walsall to postpone their league match at Delves Road at the weekend.

They will now play Bridgnorth, the league leaders, on January 2. This Saturday they travel to Cheshire to face Crewe & Nantwich.

The United, however, did manage to play their league match at Bridgnorth.

They were involved in a free flowing game of rugby despite the heavy conditions.

All the scoring was done during the first half when the hosts established, what was to be, a 12-8 match-winning lead.

Tim Hucknall scored Walsall's try and Richard Hodgess kicked a penalty. But the visitors were

guilty of squandering scoring chances which eventually deprived them of a useful league win.

Barkers Butts U-16s 10 Walsall U-16s 7

Walsall were grateful for a rearranged fixture with Barkers Butts on Sunday.

They travelled to Coventry with a much depleted squad.

The game was a very tight affair with both sides defending very well and the conditions making sure that there were quite a few spilled balls.

Although there were chances for both teams during the first half, neither side troubled the scorer. Walsall did manage to cross the Barker's line but they were held up.

The second half started well for the hosts, as a kick ahead was collected and a try was scored in the corner.

Walsall came back strongly and following a fairly long period of pressure, they managed to breach the defence.

A break by Jamie Harding was supported by Nico Watkins who went on to score by the posts.

He then converted his own try. The game came to an end with Walsall camped on the Barkers line.

The hosts scored a try wide out.

Bridgnorth U-15s 43 Walsall U-15s 10

This was a match in which both teams played some very good rugby.

Willenhall battle team and weather

Willenhall RUFC 8 Wednesbury RUFC 11 WEDNESBURY finally managed to get their first win of the season, beating local rivals Willenhall.

This was a game both sides needed and wanted to win, a great game played out in atrocious weather, heavy rain and strong winds made kicking almost impossible.

It took Wednesbury 12 minutes to get the first score. Dan Till who had already missed a couple of kicks managed to get a penalty through the posts.

Within five minutes Till added a second penalty using the wind to bend the ball through the posts.

With old campaigners such as Gary Page, Dan Blake and Kevin Ferris using all their experience, along with the skill of the younger players Jordan Allwood and Alex Love, Wednesbury kept Willenhall on the back foot and restricted their opportunities.

However, with the conditions and a tight Willenhall defence it took Wednesbury most of the first half to get a try scoring opportunity.

With just five minutes of the half remaining Wednesbury were awarded a try near to the Willenhall line.

Dominance

Using their dominance in the scrum they drove the home side backwards towards the try line, Jordan Allwood picked up the ball and dived over, no conversion.

With the weather deteriorating the second half was always going to be difficult Willenhall were kicking down the slope with the wind in their favour.

It took just 10 minutes for Willenhall to take advantage of the conditions, having put a kick towards the Wednesbury line their defence misjudged it and dropped the ball allowing the home side to pick it up and drive over, no conversion.

Wednesbury were forced to make changes through injuries, prop Kevin Ferris left and was replaced by Luke Pittaway.

With 15 minutes left Willenhall were awarded a penalty which successfully converted, this made for a very tight finish to the game. Willenhall threw everything at Wednesbury.

The Wednesbury defence battled to keep the home side at bay, as they forced their way up field.

Willenhall used the wind kicking the ball back deep into the Wednesbury half but their defence was resolute and kept Willenhall out of the scoring.

Blues stem losing streak at Boro



Gary Rowett's men frustrated their hosts and ended a losing streak into the bargain

Middlesbrough 0 Blues 0 BLUES ended their three-match losing streak in the Championship with a battling draw at promotion-chasing Middlesbrough.

Gary Rowett's side frustrated second-placed Boro to claim their first point in over a month, denying the Teessiders their fourth consecutive league win.

Aitor Karanka's men man-

aged to keep hold of their automatic promotion spot, but David Nugent was sent off late on to round off a disappointing afternoon.

Boro started brightly and almost took the lead in the second minute when Emilio Nsue burst forward down the right before laying off for Adam Clayton, whose delicate chip was turned

round the post by Blues goal-keeper Tomasz Kuszczak.

City pushed forward shortly after and once Boro failed to clear a cross, the ball fell to Stephen Gleeson whose shot skidded just wide.

City should have taken the lead in the 80th minute but Dimi Konstantopoulos did well to block Demarai Gray's close-range effort.

Win puts Wood into the semi-final

Walsall Senior Cup Wolverhampton Casuals 2 Walsall Wood 4 WALSALL Wood became the first team to make the semi-final of this season's Walsall Senior Cup with this win over West Midlands League Premier opposition, Wolverhampton Casuals.

Ben Birch put Wood ahead just before the break only for Casuals to equalise following Liam Hughes on 53 minutes.

Goals from Drew Aiton, Corey Currithers and Louis Harris put Wood through before Hughes scored his second on 83 minutes.

Wood put Casuals under pressure from the start, keeper James Scarrett pushing away a low drive from skipper Harry Harris on two minutes, then a minute later making a full-length save from a Dan Griffiths first time daisy cutter.

He could only watch when Lewis Taylor Boyce wide on the right found Drew Aiton on the right edge of the box, he turned away from goal before swivelling and firing inches wide of the near post.

After a quiet spell Wood went ahead on 43 minutes, a free kick right of centre was delivered by Louis Harris into the box, Ben Birch timed his run to perfection and looped a header back across the

Football

keeper to put Wood ahead. A minute later Lewis raced away wide right, his ball inside hit first time by Hughes, keeper Lee Evans making a good save from the low drive.

A quiet start to the second half but Wood nearly increased their lead on 52 minutes when Ben Evans and Steven Hayles combined wide on the left to set up Louis Harris 30 yards out, his curling shot into the left hand corner bringing a superb save from Scarrett.

Flowing

It proved pivotal as a minute later a flowing move through the centre ended with Habbershaw setting up Hughes to hammer the ball home from the centre of the box to make it all square.

Wood weathered a few minutes of pressure but took back control when on 62 minutes Corey Currithers powered into the right of the box, his far post cross was just touched away by Scarrett to the left of the box, Aiton collected the ball, kept calm, cut inside before hitting an unstoppable drive into the

far corner to put Wood back ahead.

3 minutes later Jack Corns then fired in a free kick, Evans saving at the foot of his left hand post, Giles Harvey was first to the loose ball, Evans making a brave block.

On 74 minutes a ball through the centre found Hughes in the D, his first time low drive well held by Evans.

Wood sealed things on 76 minutes, Currithers won a right wing corner and then timed his run to perfection to power home a header from the flag kick.

On 82 minutes Wood played one-touch football across the middle of the park, after about 30 passes Louis Harris picked the ball up 25 yards out and curled in a pinpoint effort into the top left hand corner, giving Scarrett no chance.

A minute later Hughes was found in the centre of the D and he rocketed the ball past keeper Evans to cut the deficit to 2-4.

Any thoughts of a grandstand finish however were thwarted by Wood who finished on top, first it was Scarrett pushing away a low drive from Aiton after he'd been put through by Currithers on 86 minutes.

Albion boss wants to sort out spat over handshake

ALBION boss Tony Pulis says he would be happy to have a drink with Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp to smooth things over.

Pulis and Klopp did not shake hands after the 2-2 draw at Anfield, and the German beat his chest in celebration at the Welshman after Divock Origi's 96th-minute equaliser.

Pulis's assistant coach, Mark O'Connor, chased Klopp onto the pitch and demanded he shake hands with him.

But after the match both managers played down the emotive scenes.

“He's animated and I've been animated all my life on the bench so I've got no problems with it,” said Pulis. “I've no problems whatsoever.”

Klopp and Pulis did not know each other personally beforehand, and the Albion head coach was asked if the pair would meet up over a drink to dissect the match and smooth things over.

“Yeah, if I can find the place!” he said. “It's all changed.”

Pulis was ‘delighted’ with the Albion players, who, for the fourth week running, came from 1-0 down to win something from the game.

But the Baggies' head coach was to speak to match officials today to find out why Jonas Olsson's goal at the end of the first half was ruled out for offside even though the assistant referee did not raise his flag at the time of the strike.

Although replays show Olsson was indeed offside, the way the goal was disallowed frustrated Pulis.

“They tell me he is offside, so why doesn't he put his flag up straight away?” said Pulis.

Dr Johnson use four-ce for Victory

Lichfield & Walsall District Football League Prem One

DR Johnson 4 ASP Victoria 1
Pelsall Villa Colts Vets 0 AFC Queens 4

League Two
Alma FC 4 Eximius Warriors 0
Dog FC 0 Queens Head 6
Oak Park Rangers 2 Walsall Phoenix 1

League Three
Bowling Green FC 1 AFC Cat 0
Paradise FC 3 Bowman FC 4

Under 21s
Cannock Town 0 Chasetown Sch. Blues 5

Chasetown Sch, Reds 4 Burntwood Dragons 2

Jack Donnelley Cup - Round One
Streety FC 3 Duke of Wellington 2

Jack Donnelley Cup - Round Two
Burntwood Town 5 Scales FC 2

Villa looking likely to get new chairman

VILLA are set to appoint a new chairman and another board member should the club not find a buyer, according to their website.

A report from a meeting on Sunday between fans' representatives and Villa chief executive Tom Fox said the move follows a statement from owner Randy Lerner that a new chairman would be appointed should the owner be unable to find a new buyer.

A report on the website of the Aston Villa Supporters' Trust states: “Tom (Fox) advised the announcement of the new chairman would be made imminently, as well as that of the appointment of an additional board member.”

It is not known whether the appointment would be internal or external.

Sport

Willenhall fight a double battle

Page 31

Battling Blues stem losing run

Page 31



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Khalsa take win streak to 11 games

Sporting Khalsa 2 Stourport 0

KHALSA'S winning league run was stretched to 11 matches as goals from Tes Robinson and Marvin Nisbett saw off a very game Stourport side.

The first half was a tepid affair, although a trio of opportunities presented themselves to the home side.

On 22 minutes, Khalsa top scorer Craig Bannister found himself in a shooting position and fired wide at the near post and a second later Nisbett managed to put Swifts keeper Dominic Richards under enough pressure for him to spill the ball, but the striker was unable to force home.

Things cranked up a little before half time, a looping header by Brad Lawley was tipped over the bar by Richards and two minutes later at the other end a shot by James Hill was well held by James Pemberton.

Richards produced another great save on 43 minutes, Lawley chesting a ball down to Bannister who hit a fine long-range effort.

Ben Maund fired the opening shot in the second half, forcing a routine save from Pemberton shortly after the restart.

Khalsa finally took the lead on 57 minutes, Robinson smashing the ball into the roof of the net.

Five minutes later Nisbett wrapped up the scoring, lobbing home after chasing a through ball.

Stourport captain Ryan Wallcott showed some real quality on 75 minutes, weaving through the Khalsa midfield and firing a decent effort just wide.

With 10 minutes to go, substitute Simon Townsend's header looped just over from Nisbett's cross and with the clock ticking to full time Nisbett's header from a deep Bannister free-kick ended up going just over the bar.

Top candidates 'in dark' over boss' job at Saddlers

LEADING candidates to fill the managerial hot seat at Walsall remain in the dark over the vacancy.

The Saddlers have been on the hunt for a new boss since Dean Smith moved to Championship outfit Brentford more than a fortnight ago.

Sean O'Driscoll, Mark Cooper, Adi Viveash, Jose Dominguez, Dean Saunders and Dean Holden are all among the favourites.

But it's understood none of those candidates have been approached by the Saddlers board.

It now seems likely caretaker managers Jon Whitney, John Ward and Neil Cutler will remain in the dugout for Sunday's League One clash with Port Vale as the board continues to assess their options.

Despite the lack of movement, a string of high-profile managers continue to express their interest in the role.

Sources close to Saunders confirmed he would be interested in moving to the Banks's.

Last Saturday's game at Fleetwood, has been rearranged for January 26.

Disappointing end to a good year

Sikh Union 7 Bloxwich Mens 1st 3

BLOXWICH ended a fantastic 2015 with a very disappointing result against a strong and skilful Sikh Union side this weekend.

The visitors struggled to keep up with the Coventry side in the first half and were completely over run by the league high fliers and the home side took advantage of several errors.

Defensive mistakes and poor play from Bloxwich gave Union a 6-1 lead in the first half much to the embarrassment of the Bloxwich team and from which they never really recovered.

In the second half Bloxwich dug in and started to play hockey with a lot more passion and gusto

Hockey

and they began to see the results of their efforts.

This revived style of play helped Bloxwich get another two goals with Steve Mallows getting his second of the match and Matt Baldwin getting the third.

It seemed like Bloxwich were heading for something of a revival but the home side managed to hold them off.

Bloxwich continued to battle hard despite the win being out of their grasp and The Union sealed the win with their seventh goal of the game putting the visitors out of the running. With a huge amount of dismay in the team after this loss, Bloxwich cannot be too disappointed with their start to the new season. Finishing 2015 in fourth place as a newly promoted team in the league is impressive for a team who have not been in this league for some time.

With some fantastic results already under their belt, Bloxwich hope to keep on picking up points in 2016 and they know their promotion chances are still looking positive.

With their first match back against Wednesday in January, Coach Mallows hopes the team take it easy on the mince pies over Christmas.

WOOD'S VASE RUN BROKEN

FA Vase Round 3.
Walsall Wood 0 Alvechurch 3

THIS was a far better contest than the League game in September.

But it was still Alvechurch who marched into round four courtesy of two goals from Karl Edwards and the seventh minute opener from Danny Ashton that had left Wood always playing catch up.

From a left wing corner Ashton found himself in acres of space to head home to open the scoring.

Three minutes later Ashton crossed from the right, Karl Edwards saw his first time effort blocked, the ball dropping to Marsh firing in a 20 yard low drive that was well held by keeper Lee Evans.

A long ball forwards was headed on by Edwards to put Marsh clear on the left edge of the box, Luke Wright making a superb challenge.

Wood's first effort came on 27 minutes, Harry Harris chipped a free kick in a left of centre position to the far post, Wright heading back across goal and just over the far angle.

Four minutes later the visitors doubled their lead, a speculative high ball forward was misread by a defender allowing Edwards to race for goal, calmly slotting the ball past the advancing Evans.

Challenge

March raced clear wide left, went through one tackle before being stopped by Wright with another great challenge.

On 68 minutes from a Wood right wing corner the ball was half cleared to Drew Atton left of centre, he turned away from his marker and hit a low drive narrowly wide.

Connor Deards (another substitute) hit a first time effort from the left of the box, Wood keeper Evans saving at full stretch.

On 80 minutes the keeper completely missed a back pass but quickly recovered to race back and hack the ball clear.

Then five minutes later Nick Wright powered down the left, came in along the byline, crossed low into the six-yard box for Edwards to tap home from a matter of inches.

On 90 minutes Wright's low drive was saved.

Forest snatch Wolves win away



Jordan Graham of Wolves fouled by Henri Lansbury of Forest during the match at Molineux

Wolves 1 Notts Forest 1

IN a season of missed opportunities, here was yet another for Wolves.

Having led 1-0 for 65 minutes and created chances, they succumbed to Dexter Blackstock's soft equaliser just 10 minutes from time.

As ever with Wolves this season, it wasn't for a lack of trying that they failed to beat their fairly limited opponents. Sadly, a lack of quality was again their Achilles heel, particularly in central areas.

In the continued absence of the benched Benik Afobe, their most likely source of goals

came down the flanks, particularly through man-of-the-moment Jordan Graham, whose wing play was at times scintillating.

So too were his set pieces, and one such well-placed free-kick was served on a plate for Ethan Ebanks-Landell to nod home the opening goal.

But for all their effort and spirit, Wolves lacked that bit of magic to put the game to bed.

On the plus side, they are now unbeaten in five, albeit having drawn four of those, and are just two points behind their total of this stage last season.

But Kenny Jackett knows his team have a lot of improving to do if they're to mount a sustained charge for the play-offs.

Legend Mick has faith in board choice

LEGENDARY goalkeeper Mick Kearns is confident Walsall's hierarchy will make the right decision when appointing a new manager.

But the 65-year-old has warned Saddlers fans to remain patient throughout the search, with the former shot-stopper believing it's very hard to replace a successful boss.

The Walsall board has been looking for a new manager ever since Dean Smith swapped the Banks' Stadium for Brentford two weeks ago.

And with Jon Ward, John Whitney and Neil Cutler in caretaker charge, Kearns insists there is no rush.

"From any club's point of view, it's very difficult to appoint a new manager when your old one leaves because of his success," Kearns said. "The club want to keep that continuity and find someone who can run things in a similar way."

"That makes the decision very difficult, so patience is needed."

"We need to appoint someone with the right philosophy, a philosophy the players are used to."

"When you are looking for a manager after a manager has been sacked, it's easier because you need someone to come in and turn the club upside down."

"This appointment is much more difficult but I am confident, I am really confident, they will get the decision right."

Walsall saw their League One clash with Fleetwood postponed on Saturday due to a waterlogged pitch at Highbury Stadium.

"But there is no rest for the Saddlers, who face Chesterfield in an FA Cup replay tomorrow, with Whitney revealing attentions switched to that game the moment it was confirmed Fleetwood was off."

"We were ready for the Fleetwood game, we had planned for it all week."

Jackett holds high hopes for new blood

KENNY Jackett says Wolves have 'high hopes' for the current crop of youngsters making their mark with the club.

The Wolves starlets beat Manchester United 3-2 in the league on Saturday to follow up their impressive FA Youth Cup win over MK Dons and an 8-0 thrashing of league leaders Everton.

The likes of Niall Ennis, Connor Roman and Nicu Carnat have been touted as potential future stars.

And Jackett said there was a good chance that some of the side could follow in the footsteps of the likes of Carl Ikeme and Danny Batth, currently regulars in the first team.

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